

2 Ayutthaya Rising

In 686 of the lesser era, a year of the rat, the Buddha image of Lord Phananchoen¹ was established. In 712, a year of the tiger, on Friday, the sixth waning day of the fifth month at three hours and nine segments, the great city of Si Ayutthaya was established. In 731, a year of the cock, Wat Phra Ram was established. At that time, King Ramathibodi died.²

Thus begins the Luang Prasoet chronicle of Ayutthaya, compiled in 1681 from “documents written by astrologers, documents from the library, and events in the royal chronicles.” What is fascinating in this extract is what is missing. About the city’s founder, all the chronicle records is his death. At Ayutthaya, in contrast to Sukhothai and Lanna, there are no inscriptions telling of warrior glory, and no ballads or legends securely dated to the city’s early years.³ Ayutthaya was a different kind of place.

The date of establishing the city in the chronicle is equivalent to March 4, 1351. Ayutthaya existed before this official foundation – as an ambitious port-city. From the late thirteenth century, it sent expeditions south down the peninsula and across to Sumatra, to extract resources and gain a share of the coastal trade. It became China’s major trading partner in Southeast Asia. In the Thai chronicles, the story of this trade-and-raid port-city is invisible. Here it is told through outside sources, mainly Chinese records, Arabic texts, annals from the Malay world, and early Portuguese reports.

From the late fourteenth century, Ayutthaya expanded its influence into the interior, mainly northwards up the Chaophraya river system. In the old historiography, it absorbed Sukhothai and the Northern Cities through military might. That interpretation is based on a model of military subjection and territorial control, borrowed from

¹ A massive Buddha image, now in Wat Phananchoen to the southeast of the island.

² *Phraratcha phongsawadan krung kao chabap luang prasoet*, 12. This translation is slightly different from *RCA*, 10, ll. 32–6; 11, ll. 34–5. The “segment” (*bat*) in the time was later equivalent to six minutes.

³ Many legends appeared later, as discussed below. See Charnvit, *Rise of Ayudhya*, ch. 4.

the modern European state system. Rereading the sources against a different model of political power produces a different result. The key political unit is the city-state. Broader structures are formed by relations among rulers. Sukhothai and other places remained as largely independent city-states for much longer than usually imagined. The emergence of Siam came about through a merger between the ruling families, peoples, cultures, and practices of Ayutthaya and the Northern Cities over two centuries. The port-city of Ayutthaya was gradually transformed by administrative systems, artistic taste, religious practice, and much else originating from its northern neighbors. At the climax of this process in the mid-sixteenth century, northern nobles took power in Ayutthaya.

Xian and the Peninsula

Ayutthaya sits at the center of the lower Chaophraya deltaic plain. In the era before modern engineering, the rivers rose for around three months during the monsoon to a maximum of 4 meters above their dry-season level, flooding most of the lower plain.⁴ Settlements in the floodplain were confined to riverside levees, created by the deposit of silt, or some slightly elevated areas. Ayutthaya lies at the southern tip of one such area. The site flooded most years by a meter, turning the city into “islands in the middle of a sea ... Along the shoreline of the city, which remains above the waterline of the rising river, the land is higher. The river does overflow here, but not as much as elsewhere.”⁵

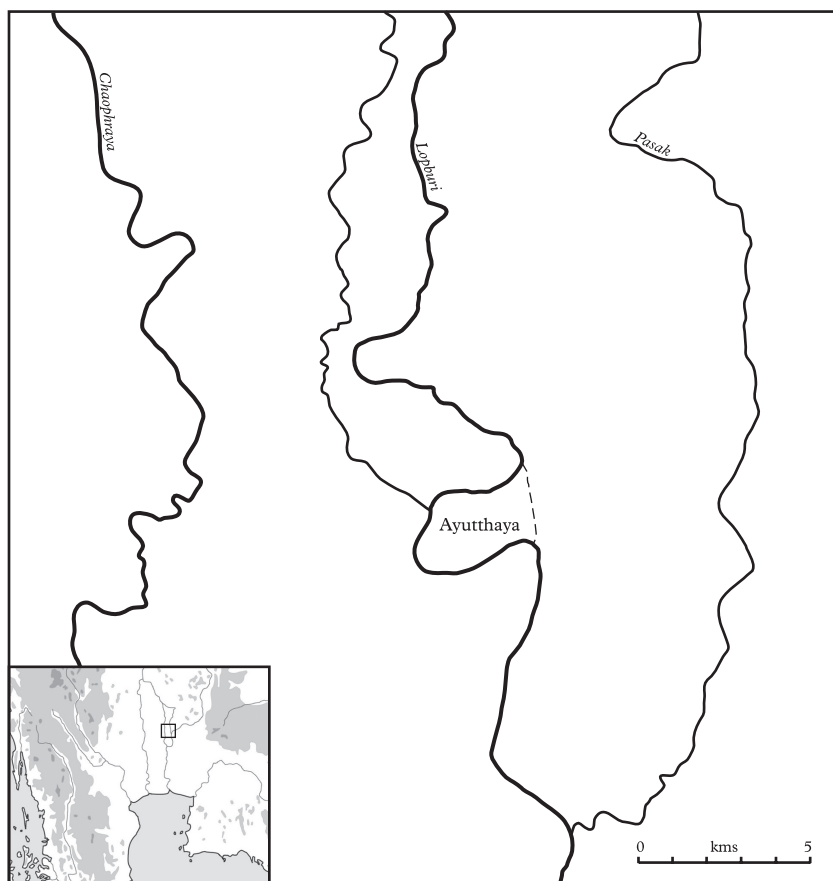
The fall from Chainat to the sea, a distance of 200 kilometers, is just 15 meters. Crossing this gently sloping plain, the rivers snake and occasionally shift course. Early settlements in this landscape were often located in meanders converted to a moated site by a canal.⁶ Ayutthaya today is at the junction of the Pasak and Chaophraya Rivers, but in earlier times neither of these rivers came close, only the Lopburi River, which splits from the Chaophraya at Singburi, and would have carried much more water in the past than today. On reaching the elevated land around Ayutthaya, it twisted like a snake, creating an exaggerated meander easily converted into a moat by a canal on the eastern side, possibly following the course of the Nai Kai Canal today (see Map 2.1).⁷

⁴ Takaya, *Agricultural development*, 133–4.

⁵ Diogo da Couto around 1600 in Breazeale, “Portuguese impressions of Ayutthaya,” 53.

⁶ Pornpun, “Environmental history,” 6–20.

⁷ The old course of the Pasak, now obliterated, was traced by Phraya Boranratchathanin; see Wansiri and Pridi, *Krung kao lao rueang*, 127–30.



Map 2.1. Old courses of rivers around Ayutthaya

Emergence

In 1282/3, a Chinese official fled to a port named “Xian.”⁸ In early scholarship Xian was identified as Sukhothai, but this is unlikely. The Chinese court included Xian on a list of *maritime* kingdoms from which it demanded submission.⁹ The Guangzhou gazetteer from 1297 to 1307 recorded that the “Country of Xian controls Shang-shui Su-gu-di,”¹⁰

⁸ Wade, “*Ming shi-lu* as a source,” 257, fn. 13. The Chinese term is sometimes rendered as Hsien or Sien.

⁹ Luce, “Early Syam in Burma’s history,” 61, 76.

¹⁰ Yamamoto, “Thailand as it is referred to in the *Da-de Nan-hai Zhi*.”

where Su-gu-di is clearly Sukhothai, and Shang-shui may be another place-name, or may indicate that Su-gu-di was “upriver” from Xian. By the mid-fourteenth century, the Chinese records clearly use Xian to mean Ayutthaya. Maybe the Chinese originally used the term for a different place,¹¹ but most likely Xian meant Ayutthaya from the start.

Xian sent a mission to China in 1292, and China sent a return mission in the following year, suggesting Xian was already a port of some status. In 1296, the Chinese envoy to Angkor, Zhou Daguan, recorded that Cambodia imported cloth and silkworms from Xian, and suffered from repeated attacks by its people.¹² The early history of Xian, however, is unknown. Some historians have proposed that there was an earlier Khmer-style settlement to the east of the later city, where there are old *wat* and traces of *barai*.¹³ More likely, the old settlement was in the meander. At Wat Mahathat, which would have been roughly at the center of such a settlement, there are distinctive Khmer motifs carved on stones believed to have been taken from an earlier structure. Under this *wat* and nearby Wat Khun Mueang Jai there are traces of pre-twelfth century buildings.¹⁴ Old *wat* in the area to the east may have been forest monasteries, similar to the pattern of other early towns. Digs have yielded pottery shards dateable back to the 1270s.¹⁵

Other evidence suggests Ayutthaya was a substantial place before its “foundation” in 1351. According to the Luang Prasoet chronicle, the Phananchong image was established in 1324/5, possibly as a large free-standing Buddha outside the city, similar to the Palelai image at Suphanburi.¹⁶ The *Tamnan mulasasana*, a Buddhist chronicle, relates that the Sukhothai monks Sumana and Anomadasi visited Ayutthaya in search of Buddhist scriptures in the 1320s, and that another monk had earlier been honored on return from Lanka by the “king of Ayōdhiyā.”¹⁷ On his return from Sri Lanka around 1344, the Sukhothai monk Si Sattha visited “Ayodhya Si Ramathepnakhon, the place of the pond of Virunasa of Patala.”¹⁸ “Si Ramathepnakhon” means the city of the god Rama. In the *Ramayana*, Viruna is the *naga* king of Patala, who gives refuge to

¹¹ Rungrot (“Lum maenam chaophraya,” 135–8) suggests that Xian was originally Suphanburi, but has no evidence.

¹² Zhou, *Record of Cambodia*, 50, 76, 79, 82.

¹³ Srisakara, *Krung si ayutthaya khong rao*, foreword.

¹⁴ Polkinghorne et al., “One Buddha can hide another,” 586; *Boramasathan nai jangwat phranakhon si ayutthaya*, vol. 2, 51–2.

¹⁵ Pricha, *Set phachana din phao*.

¹⁶ RCA, 10, ll. 32–3 (LP).

¹⁷ Sommai and Swearer, “Translation of *Tamnan mūlasāsanā*,” 80–1; Griswold and Prasert, “King Lōdaiya of Sukhodaya,” 24, 59.

¹⁸ Translation adapted from Griswold and Prasert, “King Lōdaiya of Sukhodaya,” 137–8, 143; Trongjai, *Pramuan jaruek samai phraya lithai*, 153–8.

Rama's wife, Sita. The pond may be the Sano Pond which figures in other legends of the city's foundation and is probably the lake in the middle of the island now known as *bueng ram*, Rama's Pond. Damaged words in the inscription may refer to a palace beside the pond.¹⁹ By the early fourteenth century, a town already existed on the site, had a significant Buddha image, and had been named through references to the *Ramayana*.

Xian possibly began as an offshoot from the long-established city at Lopburi (Lavo) on the same river. The *Ming shi-lu* reports:

Xian was later divided in two countries, Lavo and Xian. In Xian the soil is barren and not suitable for agriculture. The terrain of Lavo is a fine, level plain and most of the plantations yield good crops, and Xian depended on them for supplies.²⁰

Xian may have been "barren" because the lower Chaophraya delta was marshy or saline. Ma Huan, the recorder of the Zheng He voyages, reported in 1433 that Xian was poor for agriculture because the land was "wet and swampy."²¹ Xian/Ayutthaya seems to have risen to overshadow Lopburi and other cities in the lower Chaophraya Plain by exploiting opportunities created by the decline of the Srivijaya trading network in the thirteenth century.

Xian After Srivijaya

From the tenth to thirteenth centuries, the population of southern China increased by migration and the economy grew on agricultural innovation. To promote trade as a revenue source, the Sung rulers invested in harbors, rewarded successful local merchants with high ranks, set up rest-houses for foreign merchants "who were welcomed on arrival by a banquet and the favors of female entertainers,"²² and intermittently allowed the export of large volumes of copper cash. Wade suggests these measures created the demand and the liquidity for an "early age of commerce in Southeast Asia," which resulted in the rise of many port cities around the region.²³ A confederation of ports in southern Sumatra became rich and powerful by monopolizing the flow of Chinese trade through the Melaka Straits. Although often termed an "empire," Srivijaya was a trading network.

¹⁹ Baker, "Final part of the *Description of Ayutthaya*," 187; *Van Vliet's Siam*, 104–5, 200–1; Charnvit, *Rise of Ayudhya*, 61.

²⁰ Adapted from Wicks, *Money, markets, and trade*, 177–8, and Grimm, "Thailand in the light," 2.

²¹ Ma Huan, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan*, 103.

²² Wheatley, "Geographical notes," 25.

²³ Wade, "Early age of commerce."

Srivijaya's success attracted rivals. A raid on Srivijaya in 1025 by the Chola king from southern India began a phase of fragmentation and decline.²⁴ At the same time, new shipping technologies and more open markets in China increased the volume of the region's maritime trade. In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, several port centers, including some on the upper gulf coast, competed to gain a share. Between 1200 and 1205 the Chinese received three missions from a state they called Chen-li-fu, probably located in the upper gulf and some way up a river, but not identified.²⁵ The ruler, who had a Khmer title (*kamre-tan an*) and Indic name (Sri Mahidharavarman), "administers over sixty settlements," and "lives in a palace resembling a Buddhist temple. All his utensils are of gold."²⁶ He sent elephants, ivory, rhino horn, and cloth as tribute to the Chinese court. The Chinese officials ridiculed the memorial as "a comic affair," and Chen-li-fu was gently "excused from giving tribute" in the future. Chinese records also mention Possulan, which was five days sailing away from Chen-li-fu. By this era there were ports on the upper gulf with rulers interested to become part of the trading world supplying Chinese demand.

From the end of the thirteenth century, Xian contested for a share of post-Srivijaya regional trade. Its fleets operated down the peninsula and across the straits to Sumatra. They were so aggressive that other port polities repeatedly pressed China to restrain them.

In 1295, China forbade Xian to attack Malayu and Jambi.²⁷ Northern Sumatra chronicles report that Xian sent "some hundred boats large and small" to attack the pepper entrepot at Samudra-aroon in the early fourteenth century, and describe a battle lasting two months and ending with a massacre of the Xian army. In the *Sejarah Melayu*'s version, the Xian forces arrived "in the guise of traders," and abducted the Pasai ruler to their capital where he was put to work "to tend the palace fowls" until a Pasai noble negotiated his release.²⁸ Shortly before 1332 Xian attacked Temasek (modern Singapore) and then plundered the straits.²⁹ Arab geographers describe Temasek as the southern extent of the coast of Xian.³⁰ In 1349, the Chinese traveler Wang Ta-yuan reported on Xian that:

²⁴ Wolters, *Fall of Srivijaya*; Wang, "Nanhai trade"; Wheatley, "Geographical notes"; Hall, *Maritime trade*, 232–4.

²⁵ Rungrot ("Lum maenam chaophraya," 134–5) suggests it may be Suphanburi.

²⁶ Wolters, "Chên-li-fu," 1.

²⁷ Flood, "Sukhothai-Mongol relations," 224; Coedès, *Indianized states of Southeast Asia*, 204–7; Luce, "Early Syam in Burma's history: a supplement," 90.

²⁸ Hill, "Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai," 127; Brown, "Malay annals," 45–7.

²⁹ Wolters, *Fall of Srivijaya*, 79.

³⁰ Tibbetts, *Study of the Arabic texts*, 240; Hall, *Maritime trade*, 240.

The people are much given to piracy; whenever there is an uprising in any other country, they at once embark in as many as a hundred junks ... and by the vigour of their attack they secure what they want.³¹

In 1392, a ruler imposed by Xian was thrown out of Temasek, but Xian's influence remained. A Malay prince, Parameswara, settled at Melaka (Malacca), but had to flee north from a Xian attack. In 1404, his son Iskander sent tribute to Xian. In 1407 Xian again raided Sumatra, Pahang, and Melaka, and "sent troops to take away their [Chinese] seals and patents" – a way to disrupt a rival trading with China.³² The Chinese set up a stone tablet defining Melaka's status after which Xian "did not dare to disturb" Melaka, according to Fei Hsin, but Xian does not seem to have been deterred much. In 1419, the Chinese again warned Xian against sending troops to Melaka with "dangerous weapons." In 1421, the Xian ruler "offered tribute of local products in contrition for the crime of having attacked Malacca."³³

Ma Huan, who may have visited Xian in 1421/2, recorded: "They like to practise fighting on water, [and] their king constantly despatches his commanders to subject neighbouring countries." Fei Hsin, another scribe on the Zheng He voyages, wrote "The customs are violent and fierce: they particularly respect bravery. They invade and despoil neighbouring regions ... and are practised and skilful at fighting on water." Ma Huan also noted that Melaka "paid an annual tribute of forty *liang* of gold; [and] if it were not [to pay], then Xian-luo would send men to attack it."³⁴ In 1431, Melaka complained to the Chinese court that Xian "had long wanted to invade their country ... They requested that the Court send persons to instruct the king of Siam to no longer oppress or mistreat their country."³⁵ In the same year, a Ryukyu ship reported that "the King [of Siam] had punished the previous chief [of Palembang] and had put a new chief in power."³⁶

Reports of Ayutthaya's activities on the peninsula fade from the Chinese records after the 1430s, but other sources show Ayutthaya continued to raid. In 1445/6, Ayutthaya demanded Melaka submit tribute, and responded to its refusal by sending "a vast army" overland. The Malay annals describe the attack on Melaka as a failure, with the

³¹ Rockhill, "Notes on the relations and trade of China," 100.

³² Wolters, *Fall of Srivijaya*, 109, 154–5; Brown, "Malay annals," 55; Wade, "Melaka in Ming Dynasty texts," 43; Wade, "Ming shi-lu as a source," 273; Wade, *Southeast Asia* online no. 1070.

³³ Fei Hsin, *Hsing-ch'a Sheng-lan*, 53–4; Wade, *Southeast Asia* online no. 2608; Wade, "Ming shi-lu as a source," 273.

³⁴ Ma Huan, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan*, 107–8; Fei Hsin, *Hsing-ch'a Sheng-lan*, 42–3.

³⁵ Wade, "Ming shi-lu as a source," 273–4; Wade, *Southeast Asia* online no. 1296.

³⁶ Kobata and Matsuda, *Ryukyuan relations*, 65.

Ayutthayan forces abandoning wooden items of baggage which sprouted to form forests north of the city.³⁷ In 1455/6, the Ayutthaya chronicle states “an army was assembled and sent to seize Malacca,”³⁸ but the Malay annals claim the force retreated after the Melakans started fires to simulate a much larger number of defending troops. Immediately after, Melaka sent a tribute mission to China, and a mission of peace to Ayutthaya. Ayutthaya’s reply pointedly addressed the Melakan ruler as a subordinate, but in the Malay annals, peace is made: the Melaka envoy helps Ayutthaya in a war on a neighboring country, is rewarded with the gift of a princess, and returns to Melaka with a Siamese envoy who is warmly received.³⁹ From this point, the Ayutthayan attacks appear to have ceased.⁴⁰ Writing in the 1510s, Tomé Pires noted that Melaka and Pahang had thrown off Ayutthayan domination twenty-two years earlier.⁴¹

It is often assumed that Ligor (Nakhon Si Thammarat) was a southern ally or agent of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya from an early time. Yet Ligor does not figure in the accounts of Ayutthaya’s southern expeditions in the Malay, Arab, or Chinese records, and does not appear in the Thai royal chronicles until the late sixteenth century. Similarly, in the chronicles of Nakhon Si Thammarat there is no mention of any involvement with these forays from Ayutthaya.⁴² In the early sixteenth century, Pinto and Pires list Ligor as a tributary of Ayutthaya, but there is no record of when this relationship was formed.

In sum, from the 1290s to the 1490s, Xian/Ayutthaya sent armies and fleets southward. In part, it was subjecting local rulers in order to extract resources, probably including people. In part, it was muscling in on the coastal trade. Pires’ account from the end of this period indicates the scale and variety of the Siam–Melaka trade before the Portuguese arrival. “Up to thirty junks a year” carried Siamese rice, dried salted fish, arak, and vegetables to Melaka, along with “benzoin, brazil, lead, tin, silver, gold, ivory, cassia fistula ... vessels of cast copper and gold, ruby and diamond rings ... a large quantity of cheap coarse Siamese cloth.” On the return journey to Siam, the junks carried “male and female slaves, which

³⁷ Brown, “Malay annals,” 64–6; Marrison, “Siamese wars with Malacca,” 61–3.

³⁸ *RCA*, 16, ll. 29–30 (*LP*).

³⁹ Brown, “Malay annals,” 68, 70–2; Marrison, “Siamese wars with Malacca,” 63–4; Salleh, “Ayudhya in Sejarah Melayu.”

⁴⁰ Marrison, “Siamese wars with Malacca,” 65.

⁴¹ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, vol. 1, 108.

⁴² The accounts of Ayutthaya kings’ patronage of the stupa at Ligor are of uncertain date; see Wyatt, *Crystal sands*, 35–6, 124–9, 144–5; Munro-Hay, *Nakhon Si Thammarat*, 80–118. Ligor appears as a dependent on the fourth face of Sukhothai Inscription 1 and in clause 2 of the Ayutthaya Palace Law, but both these passages are later insertions.

they take in quantities ... wide and narrow muslins, and Kling cloths in the fashion of Siam, camlets, rosewater, carpets, brocades from Cambay, white cowries," various spices, and goods from China.⁴³ A handful of shipwrecks dated to the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century show that ceramics from kilns in Sawankhalok, Sukhothai, and Suphanburi were being exported, probably through Ayutthaya.⁴⁴ Siam was exporting mainly forest goods, foodstuffs, and ceramics, and importing mainly people and luxury goods such as spices and exotic textiles.

Xian and China

In parallel with its trading and raiding activities to the south, Xian developed a dominant position in the commerce between China and Southeast Asia. For an aspiring port capital in Southeast Asia, relations with China were paramount. China was not only a large market and a source of advanced manufactures, but also a fount of political legitimacy under the imperial tribute system. By agreeing to receive a tribute mission, China recognized the sender as a legitimate ruler of a "country."

Before the mid-fourteenth century, various cities around the upper gulf sent missions to China. Lavo/Lopburi sent four between 1289 and 1299, Phetchaburi one in 1294, and the story of Chen-li-fu is recounted above. Among these towns, the most active was Xian. A first mission was sent in 1292. In the following year, a Chinese emissary was sent to "summon and persuade" Xian to send tribute again. When this summons was ignored, another emissary arrived with a threat of taking "sons and brothers and vassal-retainers" as hostages, if no mission appeared. This insistence on the part of the Chinese court suggests that Xian was already an important place. In 1295, the ruler of Xian appeared at the Chinese court to present a golden plate. Further missions from Xian arrived in 1299, 1300, 1314, 1319, and 1323. In 1299, the Xian envoy petitioned for special marks of favor ("saddles, bridle-bits, white horses and golden-threaded garments") on grounds of earlier precedent. Except for the garments, the request was turned down, but it shows that Xian already had big ideas about itself.⁴⁵

⁴³ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, vol. 1, 107–8.

⁴⁴ Brown, *Ming gap*, 38–41. Mysteriously, Chinese and European accounts of Ayutthaya do not mention ceramic exports.

⁴⁵ Luce, "Early Syam in Burma's history," 140, 143, 187; Wicks, *Money, markets and trade*, 178; Grimm, "Thailand in the light," 8–10; Wade, "*Ming shi-lu* as a source," 285–7; Charnvit, *Rise of Ayudhya*, 79–81, 111–3; Ishii, "Exploring a new approach," 38–9; Flood, "Sukhothai-Mongol relations," 225; Luce, "Early Syam in Burma's history: a supplement," 90.

In 1371 the Chinese authorities, concerned by an outflow of silver and difficulties controlling rich merchants and foreigners in the port cities, banned private commerce. Only tribute missions were allowed to trade, and only recognized states were permitted to offer tribute. Over the next century, Xian/Ayutthaya exploited these new arrangements to become the Chinese authorities' favorite trading partner in the southern seas. For centuries, China had looked to Southeast Asia for goods found in tropical forests. The *Ming shi-lu* lists forty-four "customary trading articles" from Xian, more than from any other port.⁴⁶ These included exotic animals (black bear, white monkey, six-legged tortoise, elephant), aromatic woods, textiles, pepper, colorful bird feathers, and medicinal ingredients. From the 1390s onwards, traders from the Ryukyu Islands also established trading relations with Ayutthaya in order to buy sappanwood and pepper for sending as tribute to the Chinese court. Ships from Xian visited Korea in 1391 and 1394.⁴⁷

Xian sent sixty-eight tribute missions to China between 1369 and 1439, far more than the Chinese stipulation of one every three years, and more than any other port. Champa came second with fifty-eight.⁴⁸ The tribute vessels carried mainly forest goods, especially aromatics and exotic items, returning with luxury fabrics, porcelain, medicines, and currency (copper cash and paper money). The amounts were significant. In 1387, the Xian envoys took six tonnes of pepper and sixty tonnes of sappanwood.⁴⁹ So much sappanwood and pepper was imported to China that they became items of mass consumption and were used by government to pay officials and soldiers.⁵⁰

Ayutthaya enjoyed privilege and favor from China. In 1377, a Chinese envoy brought to Ayutthaya the "seal of the king of the country," the same mark of recognition that had been bestowed on Srivijaya, and commented, "In terms of present-day *fan* [foreign] kings, it can be said that you are worthy and virtuous." In 1383, Ayutthaya was the first to be given a new Chinese certificate of trade, followed by fourteen other places. In 1396, an envoy came to "make sacrifices" at the funeral of the late Ayutthayan king, an unusual mark of recognition, repeated in 1416 and 1453. Ayutthayan traders were specifically exempted from prosecution, and the *Ming shi-lu* reported that "Xian-luo is the most familiar" of the 167 ports with which the Chinese transacted. Although the emperor

⁴⁶ Wicks, *Money, markets and trade*, 180; Charnvit, "Ayudhya: capital-port of Siam," 77.

⁴⁷ Ishii, "*Rekidai Hoan*," 89–90; Kobata and Matsuda, *Ryukyuan relations*, 53–5; Piyada, "Relations between Ayutthaya and Ryukyu."

⁴⁸ Reid, "Documenting the rise and fall."

⁴⁹ Wade, "*Ming shi-lu* as a source," 270; Wade, *Southeast Asia* online no. 2818.

⁵⁰ Reid, *Southeast Asia in the age of commerce*, vol. 2, 12.

repeatedly warned other polities not to send tribute missions more frequently than once in three years, Ayutthaya often sent missions annually without receiving a rebuke. Ayutthaya ships were regularly assisted when they were blown ashore on the Chinese coast, attacked by robbers, or ran out of money. The Tai-zu emperor (1370–98) considered only Ayutthaya and the Khmer were well-behaved, and rejected missions from several other ports.⁵¹

In the early fifteenth century, Ayutthaya asked to be supplied with the Chinese new set of official weights and measures for local use. In 1480, the emperor sent the ruler a set of red-dragon robes which, Wade notes, “was very unusual in Ming foreign relations and suggests a relationship of some closeness.” The Chinese court occasionally welcomed missions from females at Ayutthaya including a sister and consort of the king, a departure from the usual Chinese practice and thus another mark of favor.⁵²

At the same time, Ayutthayan traders quietly developed business outside the tribute system. An Ayutthayan ship wrecked off Hainan in 1374 was “suspected to be (just) a foreign merchant” because there was no official manifest and many of the items were not on the approved list. In 1457 and 1481 Ayutthaya traders were rebuked for privately purchasing salt and children outside the tribute framework.⁵³ Yet Ayutthaya paid enough attention to the niceties of official trade to ensure these mutually profitable indiscretions were overlooked.

The first Zheng He voyage, in 1405, marked the renewal of China’s interest in the sea. Wade argues that Chinese emperors “intended to bring the maritime world to submission,”⁵⁴ particularly by controlling the straits of Melaka and countering the increased activity of Islamic traders from the west. Through the mid-fifteenth century Chinese trade contracted, due to government restrictions and economic factors.⁵⁵ Other ports such as Ryukyu seized the opportunity to act as an entrepot between China and Southeast Asia. Over 1430 to 1442 alone, at least seventeen Ryukyu trade missions visited Ayutthaya.⁵⁶ From around

⁵¹ Wade, *Southeast Asia* online nos. 1885, 2483, 3071, 2341, 963, 3103, 314, 410, 701, 732, 1385, 1004, 2000; Hamashita, “Ayudhya-China relations”; Grimm, “Thailand in the light,” 5–6; Wolters, *Fall of Srivijaya*, 66.

⁵² Wade, “*Ming shi-lu* as a source,” 272; Wade, *Southeast Asia* online nos. 2538, 3275, 3051.

⁵³ Wicks, *Money, markets and trade*, 181; Grimm, “Thailand in the light,” 4; Wade, *Southeast Asia* online nos. 1422, 247, 2650; Wade, “*Ming shi-lu* as a source,” 270.

⁵⁴ Wade, “Southeast Asia in the 15th century,” 28.

⁵⁵ Atwell, “Money, and the weather.”

⁵⁶ Reid, “Documenting the rise and fall,” 7; Kobata and Matsuda, *Ryukyuan relations*, 67–78.

1487, the trading restrictions relaxed and “a great efflux of Chinese trading junks from ports in South China” began to arrive in Southeast Asian ports.⁵⁷ By the 1490s, according to Wade, the private trade “appears ... to have far outstripped the formal, official trade.”⁵⁸ From 1511, tribute missions declined in importance, reduced to one per reign, but the private trade compensated.⁵⁹ In the early sixteenth century, there was another burst of trade between Ayutthaya and the Ryukyu Islands with twenty-one voyages over 1509–64, with crews numbering from 112 to 232 persons.⁶⁰

Through its deft exploitation of the Chinese official system and its lacunae, Ayutthaya became the dominant trading center on the Southeast Asian mainland.

Chinese Settlers

Chinese settlements appeared in most ports and political centers of the region following the expansion of Chinese trade from the eleventh century onwards. Zhou Daguan mentions Chinese at both Angkor and Champa in 1296.⁶¹ Skinner suggests there were Chinese settlements in all the gulf ports before the thirteenth century.⁶² In 1282, some 200 Sung refugees fled to the gulf and the Chinese sent a mission to Xian to recover them.⁶³ In 1282/3, a Chinese official fleeing the Mongol army took up residence at Xian, suggesting it was a known place of refuge.⁶⁴ According to legend, the Phananchong image was erected in 1324/5 at the cremation site of a Chinese princess, who had been sent to the Ayutthaya king and who had committed suicide. The image became a place of pilgrimage for Chinese traders.⁶⁵

From 1371, the Ming restrictions on Chinese traveling overseas or transacting with foreign traders encouraged the development of Chinese expatriate communities throughout Southeast Asia. Although the expatriates were not officially allowed to return, they were in practice welcomed as captains and traders on foreign ships. At Ayutthaya, some Chinese became the king's agents in the tribute trade.⁶⁶ In 1412, a Chinese named

⁵⁷ Mills, “Arab and Chinese navigators,” 9.

⁵⁸ Wade, “*Ming shi-lu* as a source,” 271.

⁵⁹ Reid, *Southeast Asia in the age of commerce*, vol. 2, 15.

⁶⁰ Kobata and Matsuda, *Ryukyuan relations*, 96–9.

⁶¹ Zhou, *Record of Cambodia*, 51, 59, 67–8, 70–1, 81.

⁶² Skinner, *Chinese society in Thailand*, 1–2.

⁶³ Charnvit, *Rise of Ayudhya*, 66; Wade, “*Ming shi-lu* as a source,” 257, fn. 1.

⁶⁴ Ishii, “Exploring a new approach,” 38.

⁶⁵ Charnvit, “Origins of a capital and seaport,” 66.

⁶⁶ Wade, “*Ming shi-lu* as a source,” 283–4.

Qie Jiamei was given official appointment as an envoy from Ayutthaya to China.⁶⁷ In the 1420s, when the Ayutthaya ruler built Wat Ratchaburana, Chinese and Arabic merchants donated to the project, and deposited records and religious objects in the crypt hidden deep within the building. Several Chinese family names are found in the inscriptions, along with the phrase, “Great Ming Empire, donated by Buddhist followers.” Murals on the crypt’s walls depicted Chinese-style guardians, and a banner with Chinese script. Pattaratorn concludes these deposits demonstrate “the presence of Chinese traders and monks in Ayutthaya, the role of Chinese at court, and the influence of Chinese enterprises.”⁶⁸

The most elaborate of the several foundation myths of Ayutthaya, recorded by Van Vliet, concerns the son of a Chinese provincial ruler. Exiled from home for sexual misadventures, he travels with a fleet of junks to the peninsula; establishes first Langkasuka and then Ligor; achieves mercantile success; marries the Chinese emperor’s daughter; and then moves gradually north founding Kui, Phetchaburi, Bangkok, and other places before establishing Ayutthaya. This story also has a Buddhist layer in which the Buddha visits Siam and predicts Ayutthaya’s glory, and a Brahmanic layer in which a *rishi* identifies the city site, guides the founder through various rituals, and quells the local *naga* spirit. The Chinese layer can be read as a legendary account of the importance of the Chinese in the foundation and development of all the port-cities of the gulf, especially Ayutthaya. The son-in-law relationship to the Chinese emperor is invoked to explain “why the kings of Siam are singularly privileged in being allowed to send their junks to Canton and ambassadors to the Chinese kings.”⁶⁹ The story has strong parallels with the foundation myths of many trading port-polities in the archipelago. In these, a Chinese or other merchant arrives in a “fully laden ship,” establishes the polity, makes it prosper, and becomes ruler of a kingdom which “was, in the final analysis, a commercial venture.”⁷⁰

Founding Ayutthaya

The core of the early Ayutthaya kingdom was four towns in the lower Chaophraya Plain which had independently sent missions to China: Xian-Ayutthaya, Luohu-Lavo-Lopburi, Sumenbang-Suphanburi, and Pichaburi-Phetchaburi. Accounts dated 1349 variously record that

⁶⁷ Sng and Pimpraphai, *History of the Thai-Chinese*, 22.

⁶⁸ *Jitrakam lae sinlapawattthu nai kru phraprang wat ratchaburana*; Pattaratorn, “Wat Ratchaburana,” 83–4, 88; Charnvit, *Rise of Ayudhya*, 81.

⁶⁹ Van Vliet’s *Siam*, 103–5, 198–202.

⁷⁰ Manguin, “Merchant and the king.”

“Xian submitted to Luo-hu” or “Xian brought Luo-hu to submission.” The confusion is probably the result of copying error. The Thai chronicles report that Ayutthaya was founded two years later in 1351. Thereafter the Chinese records usually refer to Ayutthaya and Lopburi as a yoked pair, Xian-Luo(-hu), and sometimes include Suphanburi as Xian-Luohu-Sumenbang.⁷¹

The early dynastic history is very confused.⁷² According to one version, the founder U Thong (Ramathibodi I) married into the ruling families of both Suphanburi and Lopburi. According to another, U Thong appointed his relatives to rule over these two towns. In both these versions, the late fourteenth century was marked by rivalry between two ruling families, one from Suphanburi and one from Ayutthaya-Lopburi. At U Thong's death, his son Ramesuan succeeded, but within a year Pha-ngua, U Thong's brother or brother-in-law, came down from Suphanburi, seized Ayutthaya, and sent Ramesuan to Lopburi. A week after Pha-ngua (Borommara I) died in 1388, Ramesuan marched down from Lopburi, killed Pha-ngua's son, and ruled for the next seven years. Ramesuan was succeeded by his son who ruled as Ramaracha until 1409, when a disaffected noble allied with the current Suphanburi ruler (either son or grandson of Pha-ngua) to capture Ayutthaya. Ramaracha may then have gone to the lower Khmer country and helped to build up the port-state later known as Lovek (Longvek, Lawaek, Lawaik).⁷³ This history shows that the ruling families of the two long-established cities in the area were both intent on controlling the newer center of Ayutthaya, presumably because of its growing wealth from maritime trade. However, in the *Sangitiyavamsa*, a chronicle compiled in the religious rather than royal tradition, and in the history of Siam that the Dutchman Van Vliet constructed from local sources in the seventeenth century, all the early kings appear to come from one family, though the conflicts are the same. The Chinese records also seem to confirm this, and suggest a chronology of kings different from that found in the chronicles (see Appendix: List of Kings).⁷⁴ Either way, by the early fifteenth century, Ayutthaya had become the seat of the ruler, while the Suphanburi family had become the ruling line.

There are at least seven different stories about U Thong, Ayutthaya's founder. These stories variously identify him as a Chinese adventurer,

⁷¹ Wade, “*Ming shi-lu* as a source,” 257, fn. 13; Ishii, “Exploring a new approach,” 40.

⁷² This topic is covered in Charnvit, *Rise of Ayudhya*, 106–9.

⁷³ Vickery, “Cambodia after Angkor,” 491–2.

⁷⁴ Van Vliet's *Siam*, 202–6; Wannakam samai rattanakosin lem 3: *Sangkhittiyavong*, 220–3; Coedès, “Une recension Pâlie des annales d'Ayuthya,” 18–19, 31; Wade, “*Ming shi-lu* as a source,” 261–4.

as a ruler of one of the cities around the head of the gulf (Phetchaburi, Suphanburi, Lopburi), as a Tai prince or peasant migrating southwards from the hinterland, as a rich merchant, probably Chinese, who marries a local princess, or as an Angkorian Khmer noble or royal relative who marries a local princess.⁷⁵ Ma Huan adds another possibility by identifying the Xian ruler as “of the So-li race,” possibly meaning a south Indian (Chola). Which of these stories has more truth is unknowable. The fact that there is no single well-attested foundation story suggests that Ayutthaya began as a trading power whose dominant figures had little interest in history, and that these stories accumulated later when rulers needed a history and genealogy. The inconsistencies in the early dynastic chronology also hint that this was reconstructed later when such matters became important. The variety of foundation stories reflects the city’s cosmopolitan nature – with elements of Mon, Khmer, migrant Tai, Chinese, Malay, and Indian origin – and its varied economy, with the founder portrayed variously as a prince, a merchant, or a peasant’s son.

From its early days, Ayutthaya was a cosmopolitan place. In the 1420s, Ma Huan noted there were “five or six hundred families of foreigners” in Shang-shui (which may be a place name, or may mean upriver).⁷⁶ A century later, Pires noted Ayutthaya was very cosmopolitan, with settlements of “Arabs, Persians, Bengalees, many Klings [south Indians], Chinese and other nationalities.”⁷⁷ Ma Huan provided the first description:

The houses of the populace are constructed in storeyed form; in the upper [part of the house] they do not join planks together [to make a floor], but they use the wood of the areca-palm, which they cleave into strips resembling bamboo splits ... on [this platform] they spread rattan mats and bamboo matting, and on these they do all their sitting, sleeping, eating and resting ... The men dress their hair in a chignon, and use a white head-cloth to bind round the head [and] on the body they wear a long gown. The women also pin up their hair in a chignon, and wear a long gown ... It is their custom that all affairs are managed by their wives; both the king of the country and the common people, if they have matters which require thought and deliberation – punishments light and heavy, all trading transactions great and small – they all follow the decisions of their wives, [for] the mental capacity of the wives certainly exceeds that of the men ... The customs of the people are noisy and licentious.⁷⁸

The description suggests a modest and slightly rowdy port town. The prominent role of women, which was noticed by other visitors through

⁷⁵ Charnvit, *Rise of Ayudhya*, ch. 4; Woodward, “Studies in the art of Central Siam,” vol. 1, 165–7; Vickery, “Cambodia and its neighbours,” 274; Smithies and Dhiravat, “Instructions given to the Siamese envoys,” 127–8.

⁷⁶ Ma Huan, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan*, 106.

⁷⁷ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, 104.

⁷⁸ Ma Huan, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan*, 103, 104, 107.

to the nineteenth century, is an eloquent indicator of a society focused on commerce. The Chinese visitors noticed no impressive buildings. Both Ma Huan and Fei Hsin mention religious practice, but describe no imposing religious structure. Ma Huan's account of the ruler and his residence is also strikingly modest:

The house in which the king resides is rather elegant, neat and clean ... As to the king's dress: he uses a white cloth to wind round his head; on the upper [part of his body] he wears no garment; [and] round the lower [part he wears] a silk-embroidered kerchief, adding a waist-band of brocaded silk gauze. When going about [the king] mounts an elephant or else rides in a sedan-chair, while a man holds [over him] a gold-handled umbrella made of *chiao-chang* leaves, [which is] very elegant.⁷⁹

Chinese descriptions of other peninsula states (and Zhou Daguan's description of the Angkor ruler) include great palaces, large processions, and much gold ornamentation. By contrast, the Xian ruler's abode is no more than "elegant, neat and clean," his clothing seems little different from the average, and the only touch of gold is the handle of his single umbrella made of *chiao-chang* (palm) leaves.

Ma Huan also recorded that "the country is a thousand *li* in circumference, the outer mountains steep and rugged, the inner land wet and swampy." An oval centered on Ayutthaya, stretching from the Chaophraya estuary up to Chainat, and including Suphanburi to the west and Lopburi to the east, would roughly match Ma Huan's 1,000 *li* (about 500–600 kilometers).

Early Ayutthaya was primarily a trading center oriented to the sea, probably similar to other new post-Srivijaya trading centers that appeared on the peninsula and around the archipelago.⁸⁰ The rulers of these centers were more likely to be merchants than warriors, and wealth rather than lineage was the key credential for claiming power. Their capitals were usually sited on the lower reaches of rivers where they could dominate the flow of trade goods from the interior. They lived from trade and showed little interest in controlling the land or peasantry except for an adjacent area needed for food supplies. They showed only limited interest in religious leadership, and invested little in resplendent monuments. They have left little or nothing to posterity as inscriptions. Hall summarizes how one such state, Samudra-Pasai in northern Sumatra, appears in its own chronicle as a "cosmopolitan urban centre on the edge of jungle."⁸¹ Early Ayutthaya probably matched this pattern, though with more significance as a religious center (see below).

⁷⁹ Ma Huan, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan*, 103.

⁸⁰ Wolters, *Fall of Srivijaya*, ch. 1.

⁸¹ Hall, *Maritime trade*, 215.

From Port-City to Territorial Power

From the 1370s, Ayutthaya sent armies north, pursuing the strategy adopted by many river-mouth states of exerting influence over the hinterland in order to secure flows of export goods, in this case the exotic items (aromatics, animals, ornaments) demanded in China's luxury market and possibly also ceramics.

At the beginning, Ayutthaya had no military advantage over the interior cities, which had a warrior heritage and probably access to larger reserves of manpower. A primary aim of Ayutthaya's earliest expeditions north was to acquire more people. In 1375/6 Ayutthaya armies "brought back a great many families" from Phitsanulok, and in the following year captured "many *thao*, *phraya*, troops, *khun* and *mün*."⁸² Ayutthaya also brought back people from its raids down the lower peninsula, and traders on tribute missions were reported buying "the sons and daughters of impoverished people" from China in 1457 and again in 1481.⁸³

The interior cities may also have had some advantage in weaponry. The use of gunpowder spread from China into Lanna and neighboring territories by the early fifteenth century. The first usage of small cannons, presumably Chinese, appear in the Chiang Mai chronicles in the 1440s.⁸⁴ Through maritime trade, however, Ayutthaya had access to weapons and manpower, and means to make the money to buy them. According to the Van Vliet Chronicle (see p. 285), King Intharacha (1409–24) "loved weapons so much that he sent various missions with junks to other countries to buy weapons."⁸⁵ Among the goods brought to Ayutthaya by the Ryukyu ships was sulfur for gunpowder.⁸⁶ Over time, access to the sea changed the military balance.

Ayutthaya and the Northern Cities

In the old historiography, Ayutthaya "conquered" or "absorbed" the kingdom of Sukhothai by the early fifteenth century. The chronicles report that when the Ayutthaya king's son visited Phitsanulok in 1438, "tears of blood were seen to flow from the eyes" of the Phra Jinaraja Buddha image, and this event has been read as sorrow at the Sukhothai

⁸² *RCA*, 12, ll. 14, 20 (*LP*).

⁸³ Wade, *Southeast Asia* online nos. 247, 2650.

⁸⁴ Wyatt and Aroonrut, *Chiang Mai chronicle*, 86; Sun, "Military technology transfers from Ming China," 506–7, 512–13.

⁸⁵ *Van Vliet's Siam*, 206.

⁸⁶ Hamashita, "Ayudhya-China relations," 62.

kingdom's subordination.⁸⁷ But this interpretation assumes this passage uses a form of metaphor not found elsewhere in the chronicles. The relations between Ayutthaya and the old Sukhothai kingdom or Northern Cities were more subtle and complex than this story of conquest.

The Northern Cities were sited where the tributaries of the Chaophraya emerge from the hills onto the plain. Many were transition points between land and water transport. The exotic goods that were the mainstay of the China trade came from the hills beyond. Ma Huan recorded in the 1420s that there were trade routes that led north all the way into Yunnan "by a back entrance." Ralph Fitch in the 1580s noted that "to Iamahey [Chiang Mai] come many marchants out of China and bring great store of muske, golde, siluer and many other things of China works." According to Barros, "The little manufacture there is, such as silver and precious stones, comes from the Kingdom of Chiangmai."⁸⁸

Over his reign from 1370 to 1388, King Borommara I (Pha-ngua of the Suphanburi line) made five military expeditions. In 1371/2, he "obtained all the northern cities," and two years later attacked Chakangrao (probably Phichai). Another two years later he took Phitsanulok, and captured the city's ruler. In 1378/9, he again attacked Phitsanulok and Phichai, and "Maha Thammaracha came forth to pay homage."⁸⁹ The repetitive nature of these expeditions hints that either Ayutthaya was not successful in imposing control, or that was not its aim. The term for "obtained" in the above quote is *ao*, "take" which can mean "attack" rather than capture or control. In part, these were raids to seize people and valuable Buddha images. In one account, Borommara I seized the Phra Sihing Buddha from Phitsanulok. Soon after, this image was legendarily taken from Ayutthaya to Kamphaeng Phet and then Chiang Mai, suggesting that Ayutthaya was not always dominant in these early years.⁹⁰

The idea that Ayutthaya "absorbed" Sukhothai is based on a model of unique sovereignty and the Westphalia system of states in modern Europe. But these concepts were alien to this region in this era. Each city was largely independent. Power was not unique and sovereign but many-layered. One ruler might defeat another, demand homage, and extract some resources, but the subordinate was still a king and still ruled. Overlords did not impose any administrative control.

⁸⁷ *RCA*, 11, ll. 47; 15, ll. 43–4 (*LP*). Griswold and Prasert, "Fifteenth-century Siamese historical poem," 130.

⁸⁸ Ma Huan, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan*, 106; Ryley, *Ralph Fitch*, 171; *Thailand and Portugal*, 48, quoting *Da Ásia de João de Barros*.

⁸⁹ *RCA*, 11–12 (*LP*).

⁹⁰ Ratanapanna Thera, *Sheaf of garlands*, 123–4.

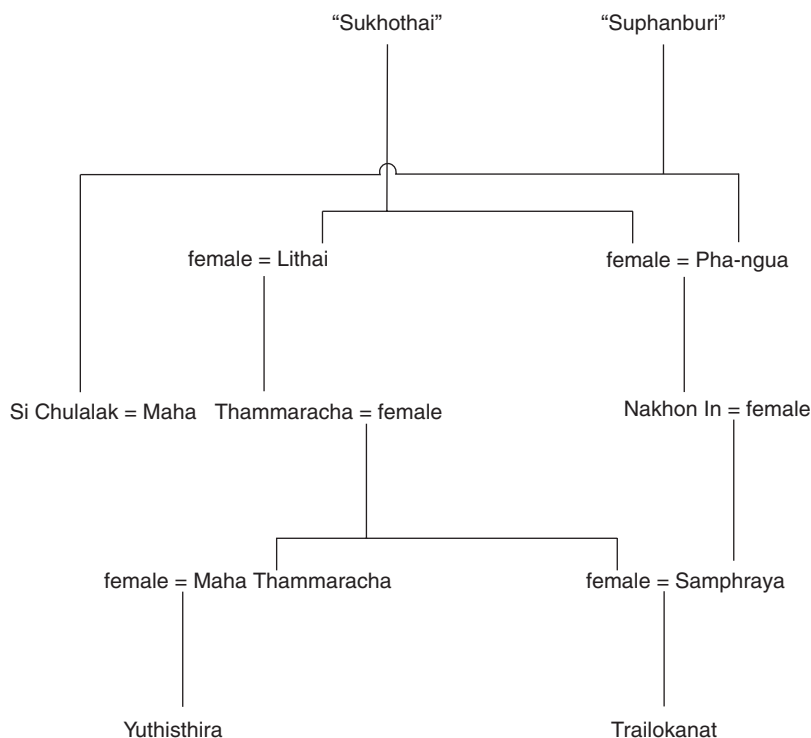


Figure 2.1. Marriage links between the Suphanburi and Sukhothai families (adapted from Phiset, *Phra maha thammaracha*, 90)

Phiset Jiajanphong has offered a more subtle interpretation of the relations between Ayutthaya and the Northern Cities. The Suphanburi family at Ayutthaya developed close marriage ties with the Sukhothai ruling clan, the descendants of Lithai, who had adopted Maha Thammaracha as their royal title (see Figure 2.1). Pha-ngua (Borommara I, 1370–88) took a daughter of Lithai as a consort. So also did the next two kings of Ayutthaya from the Suphanburi line, Nakhon In (Intharacha, 1409–24) and his son Samphraya (Borommara II, 1424–48). The exchange seems to have been reciprocated. Lithai's son and successor took as major queen a lady who carried an Ayutthaya title, who donated an Ayutthaya-style Buddha to a Sukhothai *wat*, and who was almost certainly from the Suphanburi family.⁹¹

⁹¹ Phiset, *Phra maha thammaracha*, 48–9, 73–4, 78.

In these reciprocal marriage alliances, much more was exchanged between the two regions than royal women. The queens moved to their new homes with an entourage of nobles, monks, craftsmen, and retainers.⁹² At the same time, northern nobles moved south to fulfill the aggressive merchant city's need for soldiery. The Portuguese a century later recorded that in Ayutthaya "the men who are knights and who are involved in warfare ... come mostly from the regions where can be found the cities of Sawankhaloke and Sukhothai."⁹³ Others probably migrated to a city of such evident wealth and opportunity. Climate may also have had a role. From the early fourteenth to early sixteenth century, rainfall was below average.⁹⁴ Food production may have been affected more in the Northern Cities, where agriculture depended on the immediate rainfall, than around Ayutthaya, where water was drawn from the rivers.

The Ayutthaya rulers helped their marital relatives in the Sukhothai family to dominate other cities. As part of this diplomacy, twin towns developed in the Northern Cities, best seen on the lower reaches of the Ping River. The town of Nakhon Chum on the west bank developed as a satellite of Sukhothai. The landscape has the main features of Tai settlements: a flat rice plain watered by streams from hills above, similar to Sukhothai itself. The town of Kamphaeng Phet was built on the opposite bank at the end of the fourteenth century to serve as the seat of an offshoot of the Suphanburi–Sukhothai marriage alliance. The town was sited on a raised bank of the river, and watered by channels leading river water into storage tanks, a practice found on the level coastal plain, particularly in towns built under Khmer influence. The configuration of the walls was similar to those at Suphanburi. The different landscapes of these two settlements, separated by only the width of a river, is a sketchy but eloquent glimpse of two cultures, originating from the hills and coastal plain respectively, coming into close contact. A law recorded in a local inscription hints at the interchange between the two cultures across the river. The law imposed penalties on slaves fleeing from one town to another, and on robbers taking slaves, livestock, or goods from one town to another. Phiset suggests the law was enacted because the twin towns were competitors for people. Similar twin towns appeared elsewhere in the Northern Cities, including Chainat opposite Song Khwae (Phitsanulok) and Yanyao opposite Phichit.⁹⁵ Ayutthaya's military forays into the Northern Cities, and

⁹² Phiset, *Phra maha thammaracha*, 53–5.

⁹³ Barros quoted in *Thailand and Portugal*, 49.

⁹⁴ Lieberman and Buckley, "Impact of climate on Southeast Asia," esp. 1057, fig. 1.

⁹⁵ Phiset, *Phra maha thammaracha*, 42–7; Phiset, *Sasana lae kan mueang*, 151–66; Griswold and Prasert, "Law promulgated by the King of Ayudhyā," 109–39.

the creation of these twin towns, were designed to help their marital relatives in the contest between local families for dominance.

Phitsanulok became a second or twin capital. In 1374, 1379, 1388, 1396, and 1398, China had received missions from “the Su-men-bang [Suphanburi] prince and heir to the king of the country of Siam,”⁹⁶ showing that the early Ayutthaya kings of the Suphanburi line sent a son as *uparaja* or “deputy king” to preside at Suphanburi. In the early fifteenth century, this practice was adjusted. Nakhon In, who was a product of Suphanburi-Sukhothai parentage, sent a son to rule at Chainat, the twin town of Phitsanulok.⁹⁷ This shift from Suphanburi to Phitsanulok began a practice, continued intermittently for the next 150 years, whereby the prospective heir at Ayutthaya first went to rule in Phitsanulok, which became a second or twin capital, and sometimes the dominant place. In 1424, Nakhon In’s son became ruler at Ayutthaya and in turn sent his son to reside in Phitsanulok. It was at this visit that the Phra Jinaraja image shed tears of blood. Rather than a metaphor of defeat, more likely this was a supernatural event, attracting the prince as a pilgrim. Its recording in the chronicles probably reflects that, while Ayutthaya had wealth and military power through its access to maritime trade, Phitsanulok and other Northern Cities had the stronger cultural tradition, epitomized by such a beautiful, renowned, and powerful image.

The son, who was seven at the time, was descended on the paternal side from the Suphanburi lineage, now dominant at Ayutthaya, and on the maternal side from the core Sukhothai lineage – his mother’s father, Lithai’s son, had ruled at Phitsanulok with the title of Maha Thammaracha. When this son succeeded to the Ayutthaya throne as King Trailokanat in 1448, the possibilities of a merger between the two dynasties may have seemed likely.

According to the Chiang Mai chronicle, Trailokanat had promised, on accession, to give his childhood friend and maternal cousin, Phraya Yuthisthira, the post of *uparaja* at Phitsanulok, but reneged on his promise; in pique, Phraya Yuthisthira transferred his allegiance to the king of Lanna in Chiang Mai, departed north with many nobles, men, and craftsmen, and persuaded the Lanna king to make a bid to control the Northern Cities.⁹⁸ Perhaps this tale of bad faith between cousins is the chronicle’s way of recording an undercurrent of opposition within the old Sukhothai nobility against Ayutthaya’s growing influence.

⁹⁶ Wade, “*Ming shi-lu* as a source,” 262–3; Wade, *Southeast Asia* online nos. 1428, 2112, 2917, 3969, 3119.

⁹⁷ *RCA*, 15, ll. 1–2 (*LP*); Phiset, *Phra maha thammaracha*, 72–4.

⁹⁸ Wyatt and Aroonrut, *Chiang Mai chronicle*, 82.

Yuthisthira's defection provoked almost a century of sporadic warring between Ayutthaya and Chiang Mai. Trailokanat made several expeditions to the Northern Cities, before moving permanently to Phitsanulok in 1463, and installing a son in Ayutthaya with the full title of king. Trailokanat either built or renovated Wat Chulamani at Phitsanulok, and was ordained there for eight months. He constructed a wall that enclosed Song Khwae and the twin town of Chainat, and probably gave the combined towns the new name of Phitsanulok.⁹⁹ He (or his father, Samphraya) may have built a palace there which was similar in design to the palace which he had rebuilt in Ayutthaya at the start of his reign.¹⁰⁰ In effect, Ayutthaya and Phitsanulok were twin capitals, with the senior king now at Phitsanulok.

Trailokanat's ordination in Phitsanulok in 1465 may have been a milestone in the cultural politics of the merger between Ayutthaya and the Northern Cities. Trailokanat was the first Ayutthaya king to be ordained while on the throne and was perhaps consciously following the earlier local example of Lithai of Sukhothai, but with added grandeur. He brought monks from Sri Lanka to perform the ordination, had five monks ordained before himself, perhaps a reference to the Buddha's five main disciples, and another 2,348 ordained after himself.¹⁰¹ In 1482 he held a fifteen-day festival at Wat Phra Si Rattana Mahathat, Phitsanulok's most important *wat*, probably to mark a renovation that he had patronized.¹⁰²

According to the chronicles, Trailokanat remained at Phitsanulok until his death in 1488. According to the *Sangitiyavamsa*, he abdicated in favor of his son Intharacha "after twenty years," meaning in 1468.¹⁰³ According to Chinese records, a king abdicated in 1482/3 because "he was very aged and had wearied of duties," and his successor was installed as "Krung Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya," signifying a return of the primary capital to Ayutthaya.¹⁰⁴ Whatever the dating, the primary capital returned to Ayutthaya but Phitsanulok continued in its secondary role. After Trailokanat's death, the new king's uncle remained at Phitsanulok, and although he is not designated *uparaja* in the chronicles, an inscription

⁹⁹ Griswold and Prasert, "Fifteenth-century Siamese historical poem"; Santi, *Prang lae lai punpan*, esp. 1–5.

¹⁰⁰ Baker, "Grand Palace," 76–7.

¹⁰¹ Charnvit, "Buddhism and political integration," 170; Wat Chulamani inscription in *Phraratchaphongsawadan krung kao*, 37–9; McGill, "Jatakas, universal monarchs, and the year 2000."

¹⁰² *RCA*, 18, ll. 1–3 (*LP*).

¹⁰³ *Wannakam samai rattanakosin lem 3: Sangkhittiyawong*, 222; Coedès, "Une recension Palie des annales d'Ayuthya," 19.

¹⁰⁴ Wade, "Ming shi-lu as a source," 266–8. Wade, *Southeast Asia* online no. 2722, 3008. "Krung" comes from *kurung*, a Khmer word for ruler, later used to mean "city."

from Kampheng Phet in 1510 donates the merit to “the two kings.”¹⁰⁵ In 1522, after reports of disorders and bad omens, the king again appointed a son as *uparaja* posted to Phitsnulok.¹⁰⁶

Ayutthaya, Lanna, and Angkor

In the early fifteenth century, Ayutthaya armies ranged further afield – to Angkor in 1431/2, the west coast of the peninsula in 1441/2, and Chiang Mai in the early 1440s.¹⁰⁷ These expeditions may have been made possible by the greater use of elephants, mentioned in the account of the attack on Chiang Mai. The march northward required several months. Above the Northern Cities, the army had to travel by land, in part over difficult terrain. Because the journey would be extremely difficult in the rainy season, the window for campaigning was limited. The greater use of elephants extended Ayutthaya’s military reach (see Chapter 3).

The first attack on Chiang Mai, in the early 1440s, falls into the old model of raiding for resources. According to the Chiang Mai chronicle, the Ayutthaya army, though large, was put to flight by a clever ruse, yet in 1445 Chiang Mai petitioned the Chinese court for new documents because the old ones “had been burnt and destroyed by bandit troops from the country of Siam,”¹⁰⁸ suggesting they may have burnt the Chiang Mai palace. After Yuthisthira’s defection to Lanna in 1451, however, the fighting changed in purpose and nature. For almost a century, Ayutthaya and Lanna contested for influence over the Northern Cities, resulting in a new style of warfare with pitched battles, sieges, and espionage.

Tilokarat of Lanna was an ambitious dynast. He came to the throne in 1443 by usurping his father. He extended Chiang Mai’s power eastward, taking Nan and Phrae, attempted to subdue Luang Prabang, and raided northwards, probably to seize people.¹⁰⁹ Just like the Suphanburi family at Ayutthaya, his Mangrai dynasty forged marriage alliances with the Sukhothai clans, and the two polities had probably sent a joint tribute mission to China in 1405.¹¹⁰ After Yuthisthira transferred his allegiance to Tilokarat in 1451, the two attacked south in force and took control of the northern and western regions of the old Sukhothai domain, including

¹⁰⁵ Griswold and Prasert, “Inscription of the Śiva of Kāmbèn Bejra,” 233.

¹⁰⁶ *RCA*, 18, l. 27; 19, ll. 29–44 (*LP*).

¹⁰⁷ *RCA*, 16, ll. 1–6; Wyatt and Aroonrut, *Chiang Mai chronicle*, 78–80. An attack on Chiang Mai recorded in the later chronicles in the 1390s (*RCA*, 12–13) is almost certainly misplaced; the style of writing resembles the chronicles from the sixteenth century onwards.

¹⁰⁸ Wade, *Southeast Asia* online no. 1969.

¹⁰⁹ Wyatt and Aroonrut, *Chiang Mai chronicle*, 75–82.

¹¹⁰ Wade, *Southeast Asia* online no. 517.

Sukhothai itself for a short time, and Phitsanulok briefly during 1459/60. Campaigns became almost annual events until an Ayutthaya victory at Chaliang in 1474/5, commemorated in the epic poem, *Yuan phai*.¹¹¹ After this, according to the Ayutthaya chronicle, Tilokarat of Chiang Mai “asked to establish friendly relations.”¹¹² Yet the battle was not as decisive as the poem or chronicles claim. There were more skirmishes between Ayutthaya and Chiang Mai through to the 1540s.¹¹³ Ayutthaya never succeeded in imposing its authority over Chiang Mai, but the 1474/5 battle ended the influence that Chiang Mai had established in the Northern Cities since 1451, and thus allowed the process of merger between Ayutthaya and Phitsanulok to continue.

While the main thrust of Ayutthaya’s expansion was to the north, the same strategies of marriage alliance and military intervention were evident in other directions. At the time a royal son was first sent to Phitsanulok in the 1420s, two others were sent to Suphanburi and to Phraek Siracha (near modern Chainat). This reflected an old system, seen in the Sukhothai kingdom, of developing satellite cities in four cardinal directions from the capital, through various linkages including marriage alliances.¹¹⁴ In the Ayutthaya Palace Law, possibly dated to 1468, there is a category of queen called *mae yua mueang*, which probably means royal ladies from the provincial cities. By the early sixteenth century, this arrangement had been formalized into a system of four queens with distinctive titles for the four cities.¹¹⁵

In the old historiography, Ayutthaya “sacked” Angkor. Yet Ayutthaya’s relations with Angkor, as with Sukhothai, should not be portrayed in a modern framework of territorial conquest, but in a context of raiding for resources and shifting relations between ruling families.¹¹⁶ There are references to Ayutthaya expeditions to Angkor in various sources from the 1350s onwards. Vickery argues that all the accounts of “conquest” or “occupation” through the fourteenth century are dubious. Wade and Wolters suggest that Ayutthaya may have had a presence in Angkor in the late 1360s and 1370s, but the evidence is inconclusive.¹¹⁷ In 1431/2, an Ayutthayan army attacked Angkor, carried away people and religious treasures, and installed a son of the Ayutthayan king as ruler.¹¹⁸ King

¹¹¹ Wyatt and Aroonrut, *Chiang Mai chronicle*, 85–90; Baker and Pasuk, *Yuan phai*; Griswold and Prasert, “Fifteenth-century Siamese historical poem.”

¹¹² *RCA*, 17, ll. 40–1 (*LP*).

¹¹³ *RCA* 20–1; Wyatt and Aroonrut, *Chiang Mai chronicle*, 102–12.

¹¹⁴ Charnvit, *Rise of Ayudhya*, 127–8.

¹¹⁵ Baker and Pasuk, *Palace Law of Ayutthaya*, 135; Phiset, *Phra maha thammaracha*, 48–9.

¹¹⁶ As suggested by Vickery, “2/K.125 fragment,” 61.

¹¹⁷ Vickery, “Composition and transmission,” 141–2; Wade, “Angkor and its external relations,” 8–11; Wolters, “Khmer king at Basan.”

¹¹⁸ *RCA*, 15, ll. 31–9 (*LP*); Vickery, “Cambodia after Angkor,” 491–2.

Borommaracha II led the expedition and was so pleased with its result that he conferred on its commanding general an elevated title and other honors.¹¹⁹

Ten years later, the Ayutthayan-installed ruler at Angkor was attacked by a rebel group, and in the following year he died. The rebel leader, Yat, who might have been an offshoot of the Suphanburi ruling family, came to control much of western Cambodia, but there is no record of him occupying Angkor. In 1443/4, a large group of Khmer, who had been brought from Angkor to Ayutthaya in 1431/2, including monks and astrologers, planned to take Ayutthaya by coup and then re-occupy Angkor. Their plot was discovered and over thirty were executed and impaled.¹²⁰ At the site of Angkor over forty Buddha images or fragments have been found carved in distinctly early-Ayutthaya style from local stone. Inscriptions from Angkor dated to the mid-sixteenth century and Chinese records use titles (*rajadhiraja*, *ramadhipati*, *cakrabartiraja*) not found earlier in Cambodia but common at Ayutthaya.¹²¹ Ayutthaya monks, royalty, or nobility may have been present at Angkor for some years and have treated the site with some reverence.¹²²

Over the remainder of the fifteenth century, there is no mention of Angkor in the Ayutthaya records, suggesting that Ayutthaya paid little further attention to this region, possibly because Angkor had been so conclusively abandoned that there was no benefit.

Political Geography

Although Ayutthaya gradually emerged as the dominant city in the Chaophraya Plain, the other centers, particularly in the Northern Cities, remained largely independent and still royal. The traditional royal titles of these cities' rulers were still in use through the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.¹²³ Phitsanulok was a sub-capital or capital for over a century. Pires recorded that the ruler of Kamphaeng Phet "has many fighting men. Inside his own territory he is like the King of this land."¹²⁴ A short inscription from 1510 shows him restoring the great relic

¹¹⁹ Watanyu, "Jaruek khun si chaiyarat mongkhonthep"; Santi, "Silajaruek khun si chaiyarat mongkhonthep."

¹²⁰ Winai, "Phraratchaphongsawadan krung si ayutthaya chabap ho phra samut wachirayan," 73–7; Vickery, "Cambodia and its neighbours," 288–94.

¹²¹ Vickery, "Cambodia and its neighbours," 281, 287.

¹²² Polkinghorne et al., "One Buddha may hide another."

¹²³ Maha Thammaracha in Phitsanulok, Phaya Chaliang in Chaliang/Sawankhalok, Phaya Ramaraj in Sukhothai, Phaya Saen Soi Thao or Dhammasokaraja in Kamphaeng Phet, see Vickery, "2/K.125 fragment," 73–7.

¹²⁴ Pires, *Suma Oriental*, 101.

stupa, casting a Shiva statue, dredging a river, restoring a road, setting boundary markers, and repairing irrigation channels – all kingly activities.¹²⁵ Barros, who summarized Portuguese knowledge of Siam in the mid-sixteenth century, relayed that the largest cast image in Siam was at Sukhothai, that it was embellished with gold leaf on the upper section and colored decoration below, and that Ayutthaya had nothing to rival this in size or splendor.¹²⁶ On his visit to the Northern Cities in 1908, the future King Vajiravudh was surprised to find that the centers of Sukhothai, Si Satchanalai, Kamphaeng Phet, Phichai, and Phichit had been laid out like royal cities and sometimes had monuments as grand as those at Ayutthaya.¹²⁷

These places disappear from the history, and hence seem crushed, because no chronicles or other written records have survived from this area other than some foundation legends,¹²⁸ but the places themselves tell a story. Chaliang-Satchanalai and Kamphaeng Phet were large and flourishing centers in the sixteenth century. Kamphaeng Phet was refortified with high brick walls and ramparts.¹²⁹ Chaliang was ringed with a laterite wall accommodating gun placements. Both cities were embellished with new complexes of temples in the style of a royal capital. Outside both places spread large areas which are now dotted with the ruins of small *wat*, which presumably were community temples and which suggest a large population. At Sukhothai, the walls were improved by adding two new rings. Piriya argues that many of the Sukhothai buildings attributed to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were built or substantially extended much later.¹³⁰

Both Sukhothai and Chaliang-Satchanalai became large production centers for ceramics. At Satchanalai, production may have started from the tenth or eleventh century, and exports from the thirteenth. The kilns stretched over 10 kilometers along both banks of the Yom River, indicating usage over several centuries. Originally making mainly pipes for water supply and tiles and ornaments for temples and other buildings, these kilns later developed production of storage jars and household crockery. The design of the kilns, examples of Chinese pottery found on site, use of peony motifs, and other design elements all point to some influence from China. After Ming China restricted ceramic exports in the

¹²⁵ Griswold and Prasert, "Inscription of the Śiva of Kāmbhēn Bejra," 233.

¹²⁶ Campos, "Early Portuguese accounts," 12; *Thailand and Portugal*, 46.

¹²⁷ Vajiravudh, *Thieo mueang phra ruang*, 17, 59–60, 166–9.

¹²⁸ Collected in the *Phongsawadan nuea* (Northern chronicles) and partly reproduced in the royal chronicles, see *RCA*, 1–9.

¹²⁹ Breazeale, "Ayutthaya under siege," 46.

¹³⁰ Piriya, *Sinlapa sukhothai lae ayutthaya*, part I.

mid-fourteenth century, these kilns filled much of the resulting “Ming gap” in supply for overseas trade. In the mid-fifteenth century, the potters developed a distinctive green celadon glaze through better clay and hotter firing. The Sukhothai kilns turned out celadon plates with distinctive fish and floral designs from around 1400 to the 1480s. Chaliang-Satchanalai continued producing a darker celadon in bowls and jars, known as Sawankhalok ware, until the 1580s. The products went down river to the sea, but also by elephant down to Martaban. Celadon articles have been found in shipwrecks and archaeological sites all round Asia, down the east African coast, and in the Middle East. In the Ottoman Empire, celadon was valued higher than Chinese ware. After the Ming ban on ceramic exports from China ended in 1567, exports were competed out by a flood of cheap Chinese products.¹³¹

In the 1550s, João de Barros wrote a description of Siam based on reports of the traders, seamen, and mercenaries who had spent time there. He presented the core territory as two separate kingdoms. One he called “Chaumua” which seems to be *chao nuea*, the “northern people,” equivalent to the Northern Cities, among which he specifically mentioned Sukhothai and Sawankhalok. The other, which included Ayutthaya and the gulf coast, Barros called “Muantay,” glossed as *reyno de baixo*, the “kingdom below,” hence *mueang tai*, the southern realm. He added that the latter was “more correctly speaking” called “Sião” or Xian/Siam, and that the two areas spoke different languages.¹³² Some Portuguese maps from this era show Odia (Ayutthaya) and Sian (Siam) as separate places, with Odia by the gulf coast and Sian inland in the area of the Northern Cities.¹³³ The naming is muddled but the separation is clear.

The Early Ayutthaya Polity

In the late fifteenth century, Ayutthaya underwent a revolution in government as a consequence of the gradual merger between Ayutthaya and the Northern Cities. Society had become more complex. The structures and traditions of the two areas had to be deftly merged. These reforms are often attributed to Trailokanat (1448–88) but probably spread over several decades and reigns. His successor, Intharacha (1490–91) is credited

¹³¹ Brown, *Ming gap*; Ho, “Export phases for Menam Basin ceramics”; Hein and Barbeti, “Si-Satchanalai and the development of glazed stoneware”; Gutman, “Martaban trade,” 112; Piyada, “Relations between Ayutthaya and Ryukyu,” 51–5; Peacock, “Ottomans and the Kingdom of Siam,” 11; Natthapatra, *Khrueang thuai jin*, 229–31, 449.

¹³² Villiers, “Portuguese and Spanish sources,” 121; Campos, “Early Portuguese accounts,” 11.

¹³³ Suárez, *Early mapping of Southeast Asia*, 141, 166–7.



Map 2.2. Chaophraya Basin: principal places in the fifteenth century

with tax reforms, while Ramathibodi II (1491–1529) “imposed regulations and did not want them to be transgressed.”¹³⁴

Underpinning these changes were rising royal revenues, raised from trade through monopolies. The Ryukyuan traders who arrived in Xianluo in 1419 were told that their “porcelains ... traded only under government supervision, and no private purchase of sappanwood was permitted.” Another mission in 1431 found that “the porcelains and other goods ... were mostly purchased under government control by local chiefs.” The Ryukyuan complained bitterly that this monopoly system was new and detrimental to trade. The Ayutthayan officials ignored petitions to revoke the monopoly, but sent off presents of “red and white wine made from fragrant flowers” to mollify their Ryukyuan counterparts.¹³⁵ Perhaps because of these rising revenues, the Ayutthayan rulers could relax the demands on their own people. Trailokanat “demanded tribute, impost and gifts from no-one” and “used labourers as workers with daily wages and not as slaves as most Siamese kings have done.”¹³⁶ Trade was the principal source of revenue. Ishii concluded, “The outstanding characteristic of the ‘medieval’ state [of Siam] is probably its commercial nature: the king strove exclusively through trade to increase the national wealth or more strictly, that of the royal household.”¹³⁷

The administrative machinery was expanded to handle new functions. The original administration, designed for a city-state, had four departments: *mueang* in charge of the city; *wang* in charge of the palace; *phaen* (*phaendin*) in charge of land and general administration; and *mahosoth* in charge of rites. The first expansion was to add a department to handle trade. The “four pillars” of government became *mueang*, *wang*, *na* (land), and *khlang*, meaning warehouse or treasury, in charge of trade. Whereas in 1419 the king himself had authored the missives sent to trading partners such as Ryukyu, by 1480 there was a hierarchy of officials who conducted trade negotiations. The titles appearing in missives to China hint that a department of trade had already been created under the Phrakhlang or royal warehouse, headed by a minister of Okphra rank, and including a *jao tha* or harbormaster and others with Chinese names.¹³⁸ Probably after 1490, when there was a major expansion in the westward arm of Ayutthaya’s trade (see Chapter 3), the Phrakhlang developed separate departments to handle the eastward route, westward route, the warehouse, and general administration.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ Van Vliet’s *Siam*, 213.

¹³⁵ Hamashita, “Ayudhya-China relations,” 61–3.

¹³⁶ Van Vliet’s *Siam*, 207.

¹³⁷ Ishii, *Thailand*, 33.

¹³⁸ Hamashita, “Ayudhya-China relations,” 65–9; Ishii, “*Rekidai Hōan*,” 83–4.

¹³⁹ Breazeale, “Thai maritime trade”; Julispong, *Khunnang krom tha khwa*.

A second expansion was to add two new ministers, Kalahom and Chakri, to oversee Ayutthaya's increased influence beyond the *ratchathani* or inner realm. Later these posts acquired specific regions of responsibility, and later too became identified as heads of military and civil administration, but in this early period probably had parallel roles on the same principle of counter-balancing that created left and right divisions all the way down the official hierarchy.

In this era, law was increasingly used to manage a more complex society. Early law codes are known from Lanna and other Tai states. Our knowledge of law in the Ayutthaya era comes from the collection of old law texts known as the Three Seals Code, compiled in 1805. As Vickery has shown, the dates in the prefaces of these laws are unreliable, but the royal titles in the prefaces of many laws seem to match forms in use in the fifteenth century. By this time, law-making had begun on topics such as theft, marriage, kidnapping, treason, public disorder, and crimes against government as well as rules on legal procedure.¹⁴⁰ The Van Vliet chronicle confirms the importance of law in this era: under Ramathibodi II, "no theft was known and whoever was caught being unfaithful was punished with a severe death"; his successor Borommaracha IV "was a great enemy of bad judges and punished them with death"; while Chairacha was "a lover of good justice, he was not quick to punish but had all wrong-doers properly examined."¹⁴¹ The Law on Theft, one of the longest codes, details a great variety of criminal practice, from petty theft to armed bandit gangs. The Law on Public Disorder, literally "on quarrelling, hitting, and cursing," describes many forms of personal dispute at different levels of violence. These two codes hint that law was being invented to combat the stresses of a more complex society.¹⁴²

The *Kot monthianban* or Palace Law, tentatively dated to 1468, was effectively the law on government. Its major concern was the publication of hierarchy. The law sets out an elaborate structure of precedence within the royal family, along with means to display this precedence – through dress, regalia, stage directions – on public appearances at ceremonial events and during travel outside the palace. Further rules set out a similar structure for the higher nobility along with rules on dress, insignia, language, and behavior. Besides a way of imposing discipline on the elite, these rules were designed to embed hierarchy as a principle of social order. Everyone had to know their place.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Vickery, "Prolegomena," and "Constitution of Ayutthaya," 145–56.

¹⁴¹ *Van Vliet's Siam*, 213–15. The laws are first mentioned in the chronicles in 1548, see *RCA*, 26.

¹⁴² *Kotmai tra sam duang*, vol. 3, 184–302.

¹⁴³ Baker and Pasuk, *Palace Law of Ayutthaya*, 59.

In early Ayutthaya, the hierarchy was shallow, befitting a port polity, with only two titles. Ordinary officials had the title of *nai* while higher ranks, including generals and town governors, had the title of *khun*.¹⁴⁴ As the society became more complex, this hierarchy was stretched. At the start of his reign in 1448, King Trailokanat gave new titles to six ministers. The record of this event in the chronicles has often been interpreted as the invention of the whole *sakdina* system of ranking, but this is a misreading. It states:

The king gave names, posts and *na* to officials ... he had *thahan* be *samuha kalahom*, had *phonlaruen* be *samuha nayok*, had *khun wang* [palace] be *phra thammathikon*, had *khun mueang* [city] be *phra nakhonban mueang*, had *khun khlang* [treasury] be *kosathibodi*, had *khun na* [land] be *phra kasetra*, with 10,000 *na* ...¹⁴⁵

The titles of the four-pillar ministers were elevated from *khun* to *phra*, and they were given Sanskrit-derived official names describing their posts. The two new territorial ministers, possibly founded at this time, were also given Sanskrit-derived names. The fact that this renaming exercise appears among the first acts of a new ruler (which also included building a new palace) hints at its importance. Probably this was a critical stage in collating different administrative structures and ranking systems in the merging Ayutthaya-Phitsanulok polity. These senior officials received four marks of status: a *yot* or prefix of rank; a *rajathinanam*, or title, usually associated with a particular post; a *tamnaeng*, or job description; and a *sakdina* grade. The use of parallel ranking systems suggests a merger of multiple pre-existing practices. *Sakdina*, which may translate as “power over fields,” was a numbered grade which ranged from 100,000 for the king through 10,000 for the highest officials down to five for the lowliest dependent. There is no evidence that the posts were accompanied by grants of land. The system of numerical ranking, which can be traced back through earlier Tai states to China,¹⁴⁶ was eventually extended right down through the administrative hierarchy, but when this happened is unknown. The introduction of the *phra* rank stretched the hierarchy from two levels to three. Another rank of *luang* between *khun* and *phra* seems to have appeared in the mid-sixteenth century, and *oya* or *okya* above *phra* by the late sixteenth.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Watanyu, “Jaruek khun si chaiyarat mongkhonthep,” 43–4; Griswold and Prasert, “Law promulgated by the King of Ayudhya”; Vickery, “Constitution of Ayutthaya,” 161.

¹⁴⁵ *Phraratcha phongsawadan krung si ayutthaya chabap mo brattle*, 22; *RCA*, 16, ll. 17–20 (*BM*); Vickery, “Constitution of Ayutthaya,” 162–3.

¹⁴⁶ Vickery, “Constitution of Ayutthaya,” 177–82; Lemoine, “Thai Lue historical relations with China.”

¹⁴⁷ Luang appears for the first time in the chronicles in 1548, and Okya in the 1590s; see *RCA*, 23, 159 (*BM*).

These changes in government have sometimes been linked to Ayutthaya's 1431/2 expedition to Angkor and a supposed absorption of Khmer practice, but there is little evidence of Angkor vocabulary in these reforms. Any Khmer element in Ayutthaya practice had longer roots, particularly through Lopburi. The roots of these changes are difficult to trace because scribes created new words for new titles and functions, sometimes blending a Sanskrit term with Khmer etymological principles and Thai pronunciation.¹⁴⁸ The changes in the late fifteenth century reflected the expansion of Ayutthaya, its growing wealth from trade, and the complex merger with the Northern Cities.

The Politics of Merger

This merger increased the complexity of Ayutthaya's politics. Two kinds of tension appear in the chronicles. The first was between crown and nobility. Both trade and warfare created opportunities for the emergence of powerful nobles. A noble official (Kalahom), rather than a member of the royal family, is mentioned as heading an army for the first time in 1462.¹⁴⁹ When warfare and the investment in palace, *wat*, and display raised the costs of royal government, nobles resisted attempts at increased taxation. Trailokanat's successor in the late fifteenth century

obtained large subsidies ... especially from the mandarins, but little from the community. In addition he introduced a practice in which, after the death of the mandarins, one tical of gold had to be paid for every ten measured lands from their estate.

As a result, his reign was "troubled" and his sudden death came "much to the joy of the mandarins."¹⁵⁰ In 1524, the chronicles for the first time mention a court purge: "people dropped anonymous messages. At that time the King had many of the nobility killed."¹⁵¹ Immediately after, the kingdom was inflicted with all kinds of misfortune – too little water in the flood season, an earthquake, inflation – probably the chronicle's code for dissent and disorder. In 1529, the king died and his son succeeded. The Van Vliet chronicle reports that the new king began "merciful" but before long "ruled with a severe hand," and concludes that: "During his lifetime it was generally a troubled and never a fruitful time."¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Winai, "Rueang phasa tai thai," esp. 62.

¹⁴⁹ *RCA*, 17, ll. 12–13 (*LP*).

¹⁵⁰ *Van Vliet's Siam*, 208.

¹⁵¹ *RCA*, 19, ll. 32–3 (*LP*).

¹⁵² *Van Vliet's Siam*, 214.

The second form of tension was within the nobility, between those from Ayutthaya on the one hand and the Northern Cities on the other. In part this was simply a factional struggle for power, but in part it may also have involved a clash of political cultures. The nobility of the Northern Cities had a deeper historical tradition and a strong warrior ethic. The nobility of Ayutthaya had access to wealth from trade.

At the succession in 1529, a royal son who had been *uparaja* in Phitsanulok descended to assume the throne in Ayutthaya. Four years later he died from smallpox, and his five-year-old son was installed on the throne. Another member of the Suphanburi-Sukhothai family, possibly a brother of the previous king, who was resident in Phitsanulok and may have replaced his brother as *uparaja* there, came to Ayutthaya, had the young king executed, and ruled as King Chairacha. He brought with him from the Northern Cities a number of nobles, particularly a member of the old Sukhothai ruling family, probably married to his own daughter, who he appointed as head of the royal guard with the title of Khun Phirenthorathep.¹⁵³ Chairacha made two military expeditions to Lanna, both times using the Phraya of Phitsanulok, probably another member of the Sukhothai family, as his military commander.

At Chairacha's death in 1547/8, these tensions and intrigues were again present. Chairacha's brother fled into a monastery for "If I were to remain a layman at this moment, it appears that I would surely be in peril ... only the Holy Religion of the Buddha and the orange cloth ... can be relied upon to escape danger." Chairacha's eleven-year-old son was installed as king by a conclave of "monks, Brahmans, chief ministers, poets, sages, pundits, astrologers and priests," with his mother Thao Si Sudachan as regent. Portending the trouble to come, "the earth quaked."¹⁵⁴

The story told by the chronicles of what followed has two themes. The first theme is about the danger of female power in royal politics. Si Sudachan gets pregnant by a lover, has her own son executed, and installs the lover as king. The second theme is about the tensions within the nobility. In 1529 and again in 1547/8, the nobles had attempted to install a young boy on the throne, a classic strategy of nobles hoping to limit the power of the throne. In both cases, too, the maneuver was designed to block succession by a powerful figure in the Suphanburi-Sukhothai clan. Si Sudachan may have been related to the Lopburi family which had contested with Suphanburi in the early years of the Ayutthaya kingdom. She held a consort title which suggests she came

¹⁵³ Phiset, *Phra maha thammaracha*, 97; *RCA*, 26, ll. 26–7.

¹⁵⁴ *RCA*, 21, ll. 34–5, 38–42 (*BM*).

from one of the four cardinal cities, but the identification with Lopburi is speculative. Alternatively, her maneuver may simply have represented an attempt by the Ayutthaya nobles to resist the growing power of those from the Northern Cities. The chronicles report Si Sudachan justifying her coup on grounds that “the northern provinces are in turmoil and cannot be trusted on government matters,” and her first move was an attempted purge of the seven governors of the Northern Cities.¹⁵⁵

The counter-coup that quickly followed consolidated the power of the northern nobles. Within two months, Si Sudachan and her lover were ambushed and killed. Chairacha’s brother was brought out of the monkhood and installed as King Chakkraphat. This counter-coup was led by Khun Phirenthorathap, the Sukhothai royal brought to Ayutthaya by Chairacha. Among his allies were two other northern nobles, the lords of Phichai and Chaliang, and possibly another from Nakhon Sawan.¹⁵⁶ As reward, the governors of Phichai and Chaliang were raised in rank and showered with presents. The rewards given to Khun Phirenthorathap were much more striking. He was “created Prince Thammaracha [*somdetphra maha thammarachathirat*], granted the right to issue royal commands, and given Phitsanulok to rule.” In addition, Chakkraphat presented him with his own daughter and gave her the title of *mahesi*, the same as the queens at Ayutthaya. To round it off, he added splendid presents including “a pair of barges and the insignia of royalty.”¹⁵⁷

Si Sudachan’s attempted coup had clarified the realities of power within the Ayutthaya kingdom. The Suphanburi-Sukhothai line still supplied the king, but the northern nobles were the king-makers. The old Sukhothai royal title of Maha Thammaracha had been revived, and its holder ruled in Phitsanulok with power and splendor “as if he were another king.”¹⁵⁸

The finale came twenty years later. The fall of Ayutthaya in 1569 is traditionally portrayed as conflict between “Siam” and “Burma,” and this aspect is covered in the next chapter. But 1569 was also the final act of the merger between Ayutthaya and the Northern Cities.

Peguan armies launched three attacks on Ayutthaya in 1548, 1563/4, and 1568/9. On the first occasion, they abandoned the siege because of the annual flooding in the monsoon; on the second, Ayutthaya capitulated but the Peguan king died soon after; and on the third, the city fell. Maha Thammaracha of Phitsanulok was allied with Pegu, though the details differ in various accounts. At the first attack, Maha Thammaracha

¹⁵⁵ *RCA*, 22, ll. 41–2 (*BM*); 23, ll. 7–9 (*BM*).

¹⁵⁶ Phiset, *Phra maha thammaracha*, 103–5; *RCA*, 23–5.

¹⁵⁷ *RCA*, 26, ll. 27–35 (*BM*).

¹⁵⁸ Phiset, *Phra maha thammaracha*, 105.

did not bring his troops from Phitsanulok to aid Ayutthaya until the siege had been lifted. Possibly he was playing a waiting game. In the Van Vliet chronicle's bucolic version of the second attack, Maha Thammaracha beat his wife in a quarrel and her father King Chakkraphat tried to kill him, so he fled to Burma and began "to beseech the King of Pegu to war with Siam."¹⁵⁹ The Burmese king's army approached Ayutthaya via Phitsanulok and Maha Thammaracha was made "field marshal of all of his foot soldiers."¹⁶⁰ After Ayutthaya had capitulated, according to the Burmese chronicles, Maha Thammaracha traveled to Pegu, submitted to the ruler, Bayin-naung, and was rewarded with a Burmese title and regalia.¹⁶¹ In the Thai chronicles, however, Maha Thammaracha is shown to be on the side of Ayutthaya but holds himself strangely aloof.¹⁶²

When Chakkraphat then tried to draw Lanxang into an alliance against Pegu, Maha Thammaracha disrupted the negotiations by capturing a Lanxang princess on her way to Ayutthaya. In the 1568/9 attack, according to the Van Vliet version, Maha Thammaracha again "advised the Peguan king to resume the war," led part of the Peguan army, and used Phitsanulok as a base. In the Thai chronicles' version, Maha Thammaracha starts out aligned to Ayutthaya but then defects to the Peguan side because of a desperately complex intrigue. Both accounts agree that Maha Thammaracha secured Ayutthaya's fall with the help of his wife's relatives and allied nobles inside the besieged city who opened the gates to the Pegu and Phitsanulok attackers.¹⁶³

The northern nobles now took control at Ayutthaya. King Mahin, Chakkraphat's son, either died during the siege or was hauled away to Burma. The Peguan king "invited Prince Maha Thammaracha to ascend the throne of the Capital City of Ayutthaya."¹⁶⁴ In Van Vliet's version, Maha Thammaracha retained a reference to Phitsanulok in his royal title – Phra Maha Thammaracha Phrajao Song Khwae, where Song Khwae is the old name of Phitsanulok – and this title was used in missives to the Chinese court.¹⁶⁵ Maha Thammaracha appointed other northerners to senior positions, and revised all the appointments of provincial governors.¹⁶⁶ In 1584, his son, Naresuan, swept people down from the northern cities to populate Ayutthaya and its surrounding region.¹⁶⁷ On

¹⁵⁹ *Van Vliet's Siam*, 217–18.

¹⁶⁰ *Van Vliet's Siam*, 218.

¹⁶¹ Aung Thein, "Burmese invasions of Siam," 50.

¹⁶² *RCA*, 35–8 (BM).

¹⁶³ *RCA*, 71–4 (BM); *Van Vliet's Siam*, 220–2; Sunait, *Phama rop thai*, 16–17.

¹⁶⁴ *RCA*, 74, ll. 34–5 (BM).

¹⁶⁵ *Van Vliet's Siam*, 223, 227; Wade, *Southeast Asia* online no. 278.

¹⁶⁶ *RCA*, 75–6 (BM).

¹⁶⁷ *RCA*, 96, ll. 38–48 (BM).

his father's death in 1590, Naresuan ascended the throne. The Van Vliet chronicle's account of the coronation shows Naresuan importing a more militaristic kingship to Ayutthaya: he holds the ceremony of installation in the elephant enclosure, has 1,600 oarsmen burnt alive for making a mistake during the ceremony, and lectures the Ayutthaya nobles:

This is the way you Siamese must be ruled because you are obstinate people of abominable nature and in a rotten state. But I shall do these things to you until I make you a respected nation. You are as grass on the fertile field; the shorter you are mowed, the more beautifully you grow. I will have gold strewn in the streets and let it lie there for months. Whoever looks at this gold with greed shall die.¹⁶⁸

The temptation with gold perfectly expresses the contrast between the military ethic and the commercial impulse. The old Ayutthayan elite along with its gods and craftsmen had been hauled away to Pegu. The nobles of the Northern Cities moved in to supplant them. Ayutthaya became the sole capital, but the Sukhothai-Phitsnulok family occupied the throne. The hinterland came down to the center.

Merging Languages

The early inhabitants of the lower Chaophraya Plain probably spoke languages in the Mon-Khmer family. Until the eighth to ninth century CE, the only local language used in inscriptions in the Chaophraya Plain was Mon.¹⁶⁹ Khmer may have emerged as a more standardized language over the Angkorian period, and come into greater use in the Chaophraya towns which show other attachments to Angkorian culture (inscriptions, *barai*, town plans, temple styles). At what point Tai speakers arrived in the area is totally unknown. The word "Tai" appears in Cham records in the tenth century and Khmer records in the eleventh, but may be a proper name not an ethnonym. Some have detected Tai words or distinctive Tai dating systems in Khmer inscriptions of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; but other scholars have argued this evidence is not conclusive. One of the earliest Thai-language inscriptions, related to the expedition to Angkor in 1431/2, has the text in Thai on one side and Khmer on the other.¹⁷⁰

The first Ayutthaya kings used the title *Somdet*, adopted from Khmer. Later the favored form became "*Somdet Chao Phraya*" in which the three elements come from Khmer, Thai, and Mon, respectively. Of the

¹⁶⁸ *Van Vliet's Siam*, 228–9.

¹⁶⁹ Bauer, "Notes on Mon epigraphy." The possible exception is a set of inscriptions on silver sheets recovered from Wat Song Kop, Chainat; see *Prachum silajaruek phak thi 3*, nos. 44, 50, 51.

¹⁷⁰ Santi, "Silajaruek khun si chaiyarat mongkhonthep."

early terms for nobles, *nai* came from Mon, *khun* might be Khmer, Thai, or Chinese, and *phra* was Khmer.¹⁷¹ One of the few collections of early Ayutthaya cultural material that can be securely dated is the cache of objects found in the crypt of Wat Ratchaburana, probably deposited in the 1420s. These included a miniature golden bell stupa which closely resembles similar objects from the Mon country, and 191 Khmer-style metal images and votive tablets, including images of the distinctive Angkorean Buddha-under-naga. Among a thousand votive tablets, nine have a dedication inscribed in Thai and three in Khmer. Tablets with an image of the distinctive Sukhothai walking Buddha were so numerous that they were probably being manufactured at Ayutthaya.¹⁷²

Whatever languages the population of Ayutthaya spoke in the city's early years, Thai gradually came to dominate, but this language was also a product of merging traditions. The Thai language which evolved in Ayutthaya (and is the basis of modern Thai) differs greatly from other languages in the Tai linguistic family, including that of Lanna, because of the influence of Mon and Khmer. Mon contributed many basic words, including weights and measures, but also syntax, including particles to modify verbs, and stacking of relative clauses.¹⁷³ The influence of Khmer was deeper, more like a merger between the two tongues. Thai retains the tonality and uninflected grammar which are key characteristics of the Tai language family, but has absorbed from Khmer ways of constructing polysyllabic words, such as prefixes to convert adjectives to nouns, complex sentence structures, multiple pronouns to reflect status, as well as many basic function words (to be, or, by, but), and common terms (win, walk, sing, straight). Several everyday terms, especially adjectives, are compounds of a Thai and a Khmer word, or a Thai and a Mon word. This hybridized language must have evolved from three language communities living in close proximity over a long period. The process had begun at Sukhothai, as shown by the vocabulary in Sukhothai inscriptions, but intensified at Ayutthaya. The Khmer language was also affected by this contact, taking many features from Tai, and diverging from other languages in the Mon-Khmer family.¹⁷⁴ Research on DNA shows that today's Khmer-speakers are genetically more closely related to Thai-speakers than to others in the Austro-Asiatic (Mon-Khmer) language

¹⁷¹ The contemporary terms are known from the Chinese records. See Wade, "*Ming shi-lu* as a source," 276–9.

¹⁷² Piriya, *Roots of Thai art*, 302–4; Pattaratorn, "Wat Ratchaburana"; *Jittrakam lae sin-lapawattthu nai kru phraprang wat ratchaburana*.

¹⁷³ Bauer, "Sukhothai Inscription II"; Vickery, "Some new evidence"; Winai, "Rueang phasa tai thai," 52–4, 70.

¹⁷⁴ Wilaiwan, "Khmero-Thai"; Huffman, "Thai and Cambodian"; Winai, "Rueang phasa tai thai," 44–76.

family, indicating that “genetic exchange between the Thai and Khmer groups was significant and truly reciprocal.”¹⁷⁵ Early Ayutthaya was a melting pot.

Lankan Buddhism

Ongkan chaeng nam, believed to be an oath of loyalty to the king from early Ayutthaya, suggests the complexity of religious beliefs. To witness the oath, the text invokes the Hindu trinity, the Three Jewels of Buddhism, the gods in the Three Worlds cosmology, planets, spirits of the ancestors, spirits resident in nature, and various other spirit forces.¹⁷⁶ As at Sukhothai, however, the infusion of ideas and practices from Sri Lanka seems to have given Buddhism a dominant role.

At an early date, a “Maha Thera Saddhammalāṅkācārya of Ayōdhiya” studied in Sri Lanka and, after his return, “propagated Buddhism there until it flourished throughout Dvāravātī” and elsewhere. This might be the monk elsewhere called Dhammakitti, who spent a decade in Lanka before returning to “Ayodayapura,” where he wrote a treatise, *Saddhamma saṅgaha*, summarizing the history of Buddhism from the early councils up to Lanka in the twelfth century.¹⁷⁷ In the early fourteenth century, the Sukhothai monk, Sujato, returned from Sri Lanka and established himself for a time at Ayutthaya where the king was “delighted with his virtue.” Two other Sukhothai monks, Anomadasi and Sumana, also studied at Ayutthaya, and visited again after their sojourn in Sri Lanka. In the 1370s, a Lankan monk asked for help from the Ayutthaya king to send monks, 500 families, and texts to establish Buddhist teaching in Chiang Tung. In the 1420s, a Chiang Mai monk went to study in Ayutthaya with a teacher called Dhammagambhīra, before going on to Sri Lanka. When he returned to Ayutthaya in 1424, Dhammagambhīra persuaded King Borommara II to “abandon the old sāsana [religion], and invite all the monks to be reordained and study the [new] teachings and disciplinary rules.” Six hundred monasteries accepted the invitation.¹⁷⁸ In the *Ṭinakalamalipakaranam* account, there were twenty-five Chiang Mai monks on this trip, they returned with a relic and two Sinhalese monks, and they stayed for four years in Ayutthaya where they re-ordained the preceptor of Borommara’s queen and another senior monk.¹⁷⁹ Pattaratorn suspects their arrival

¹⁷⁵ Patcharee et al., “Genetic history of Southeast Asian populations,” 439.

¹⁷⁶ *Wannakhadi samai ayutthaya*, vol. 1, 7–11.

¹⁷⁷ Penth, “Reflections”; San San Wai, “A study of Saddhamma Saṅgaha treatise.”

¹⁷⁸ Sommai and Swearer, “Translation of *Tamṇān mūlasāsana*,” 77, 80, 87–92.

¹⁷⁹ Ratanapanna Thera, *Sheaf of garlands*, 129–31.

greatly influenced the building and dedication of Wat Ratchaburana, which incorporated a small Sinhalese-style bell-stupa in its design. King Borommaracha appears to have been an enthusiastic participant in the dedication as many gold articles of royal regalia were placed in the crypt.¹⁸⁰ From his visit in the same decade, the Chinese scribe Ma Huan recorded that the ruler of Xian-luo was “a firm believer in the Buddhist religion” and that “the people who become priests and nuns are exceedingly numerous.”¹⁸¹

This religious enthusiasm was reflected in architecture. The reports of Chinese visitors in the 1420s suggest that the early rulers paid little attention to religious construction. Of the *wat* recorded as royal initiatives in the early reigns, only Wat Mahathat, built or rebuilt by Borommaracha I, was at the center of the city, while Wat Phutthaisawan, possibly built by U Thong, and Wat Phu Khao Thong, possibly built by Ramesuan,¹⁸² were off the island, as was the older stupa of Wat Somonkot to the east. Central Ayutthaya had little to rival the splendid temples and famed Buddha images in the city centers of Sukhothai and Phitsnulok. The building of Wat Ratchaburana may have initiated a custom for kings at Ayutthaya to launch a major project of religious construction at the start of a reign. The next king, Trailokanat, built a new and larger palace, began the royal temple of Wat Phra Si Sanphet on the prior palace site, and restored Wat Phraram. Ramathibodi II built a preaching hall in Wat Phra Si Sanphet and installed there a Buddha image 16 meters tall, similar to the massive images of Sukhothai, plated with 350 kilograms of gold – an image which stunned European visitors two centuries later.¹⁸³ In the 1530s, Chairacha built Wat Si Chiang, considered perhaps the finest in Ayutthaya in its time, with a massive image.¹⁸⁴ By this time in the early sixteenth century the area around the Ayutthaya palace was as crowded with temples as any of the Northern Cities. The Buddha images made and honored in the city now included copies of the Sihing Buddha and the Sukhothai-style walking Buddha.¹⁸⁵

From Ayutthaya of this era, no *wat* chronicle has survived, and there are no stories of relics and powerful monks who defy kings. In the royal chronicles, relics always appear in association with a king not a monk,

¹⁸⁰ Pattaratorn, “Wat Ratchaburana.”

¹⁸¹ Ma Huan, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan*, 103; see also Fei Hsin, *Hsing-ch’a Sheng-lan*, 105.

¹⁸² Wat Phu Khao Thong is mentioned only in the later chronicles (*RCA*, 14, l. 17 (*BM*)), and may not have been at the current site.

¹⁸³ *RCA*, 19, ll. 6–13; Tachard, *Voyage to Siam*, 180–1.

¹⁸⁴ *Van Vliet’s Siam*, 243–4; Wansiri and Pridi, *Krung kao lao rueang*, 226–8; McGill, “Art and architecture,” 190–3.

¹⁸⁵ Piriya, “Prawatissat sinlapa ayutthaya,” 54–6, 60–1, 150.

as omens.¹⁸⁶ Whether the *sangha* was docile, or memories have been suppressed, is unknown.

Sculpture reflected the rapprochement between Ayutthaya and Sukhothai. Representations of the Buddha in early Ayutthaya, often dubbed “U Thong style,” followed earlier Angkorian traditions. The face is square, mouth wide and thin-lipped, eyes seemingly lidless and almost browless, and the body often broad-shouldered and rather robust. Buddha images made at Sukhothai in the same era, and sometimes copied in Ayutthaya workshops, had long oval faces, with a rather pointed chin, a narrow but full mouth, eyes lidded with a distinct brow, and a body slight and graceful, sometimes to the point of androgyny. Until the mid-fifteenth century, these two traditions remained distinct.¹⁸⁷ According to Woodward, however, in images produced around 1500 “the old dichotomy has been completely transcended. Here is a facial type that in its hauteur is intended to go beyond the old oval/square division and bear elements of both traditions.”¹⁸⁸ The characteristic images of the middle Ayutthaya era, such as the many seated images modeled on the Sihing Buddha, are a compromise between the robustness of the Angkorian type and the gracefulness of the Sukhothai tradition.

The recording of history also changed. The accounts of the early reigns in the Luang Prasoet chronicle are very short and confined to matters of war, succession, royal construction, and omens, similar to the records kept by astrologers. There is none of the storytelling found in the Lanna chronicles or Sukhothai inscriptions. This begins to change during the Trailokanat reign, with colorful accounts of military events. It changes more decisively from the 1520s with detailed accounts of battles and a larger range of subject matter. The period from the 1470s to the 1520s is also the likely origin of the earliest works of literature in Siamese Thai. The composition of the *Mahachat khamluang*, the royal version of the *jataka* story of Phra Vessantara, is mentioned in the chronicles in 1482/3. The *Yuan phai* military epic dates to the same era. The love poem, *Thawathotsamat* (Twelve months) and the tales of *Samutthakot* and *Anirut* probably date to the early sixteenth century.

Across the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, Ayutthaya became much more like an inland capital with splendid monuments and a reputation as a center of religion, learning, literature, and craftsmanship.

¹⁸⁶ RCA, 89, 94, 123, 126, 168, 213, 242, 331.

¹⁸⁷ McGill, “Jatakas, universal monarchs, and the year 2000,” esp. 440–2.

¹⁸⁸ Woodward, “Thailand: Buddha images for worship,” 5–6.

Conclusion

Xian/Ayutthaya in its first two centuries – beginning before the legendary foundation of 1351 – was a maritime power focused on becoming a dominant force in the trading world of the gulf and peninsula in the post-Srivijaya era. Who the people were and what craft they used in these maritime expeditions are unknown, but most likely they belonged to a shared culture of the Southeast Asian coasts. Over subsequent centuries, this strong orientation to the sea became less central to the economy and the culture. As Sumet Jumsai has shown, however, water symbolism is buried deep in the architecture, cosmology, ritual, myth, and literature of Siam. While this was obviously sustained by the continuing importance of rivers and canals for transport and residence, the origins lay in the sea.¹⁸⁹

This maritime orientation is visible in the first direct records of the city (Ma Huan and Fei Hsin) and helps to explain the murky nature of its early history – no inscriptions, few monuments, Chinese involvement, a confusion of founder legends probably assembled later, and a shaky dynastic chronology. It was more a commercial port than a ritual capital.

Unlike most port-cities in the archipelago, Ayutthaya had a large hinterland, accessible by waterways. Driven by the commercial logic of controlling the trade routes and supply sources on which its commercial prominence depended, Ayutthaya set out to *become* a territorial power. This project drew Ayutthaya into a complex relationship with the Northern Cities in its immediate hinterland. Ayutthaya did not quickly conquer and absorb these cities in the early fifteenth century, as sometimes imagined. Rather, Sukhothai remained an important ritual center; Phitsanulok remained the key strategic center and for long periods the effective capital; and the northern armies remained critical for neutralizing the ambitious state of Lanna. The rulers of the Northern Cities retained their status, and their capitals became more splendid.

The merger of Ayutthaya and the Northern Cities was driven not so much by armed might as by the intertwining of the Suphanburi and Sukhothai families, and by Ayutthaya's gradual absorption of people, culture, language, aesthetics, and administrative practice from this northern region. In the early sixteenth century, northern nobles became king-makers at Ayutthaya. In the 1560s, they allied with the Peguan ruler to dislodge the old elite and dominate the city. Administrative systems, religious sculpture, literary production, and the Thai language were shaped by this merger.

¹⁸⁹ Sumet, *Naga*.

Since the late thirteenth century, a settlement in a meander of the Lopburi River had become first a prospering port-city and then a religious, royal, and cultural center of growing power and splendor. The society of this city and its hinterland was shaped by a rising trend of warfare in the region.